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March/April 1999
Issue Number 23

five iron frenzy

7

modern music on cue

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CROSS MOVEMENT

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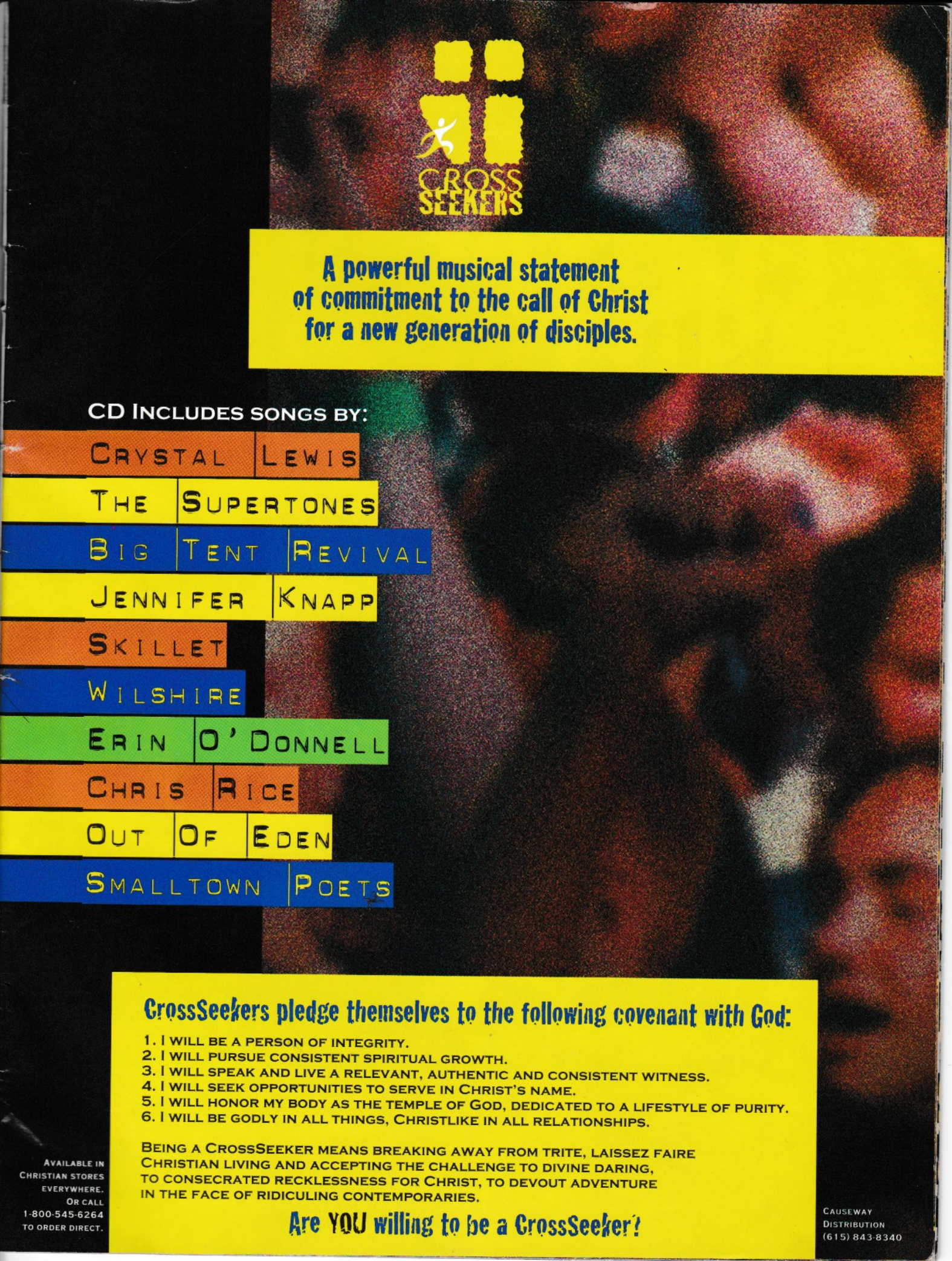

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On tour this Spring with Five Iron Frenzy

re:think

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SIT BACK, HAVE A CUP OF JOE, READ AND BE AMAZED.

IT IS SAID THAT READERS OF 7ball ARE HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER

March/April 1999 Issue no. 23

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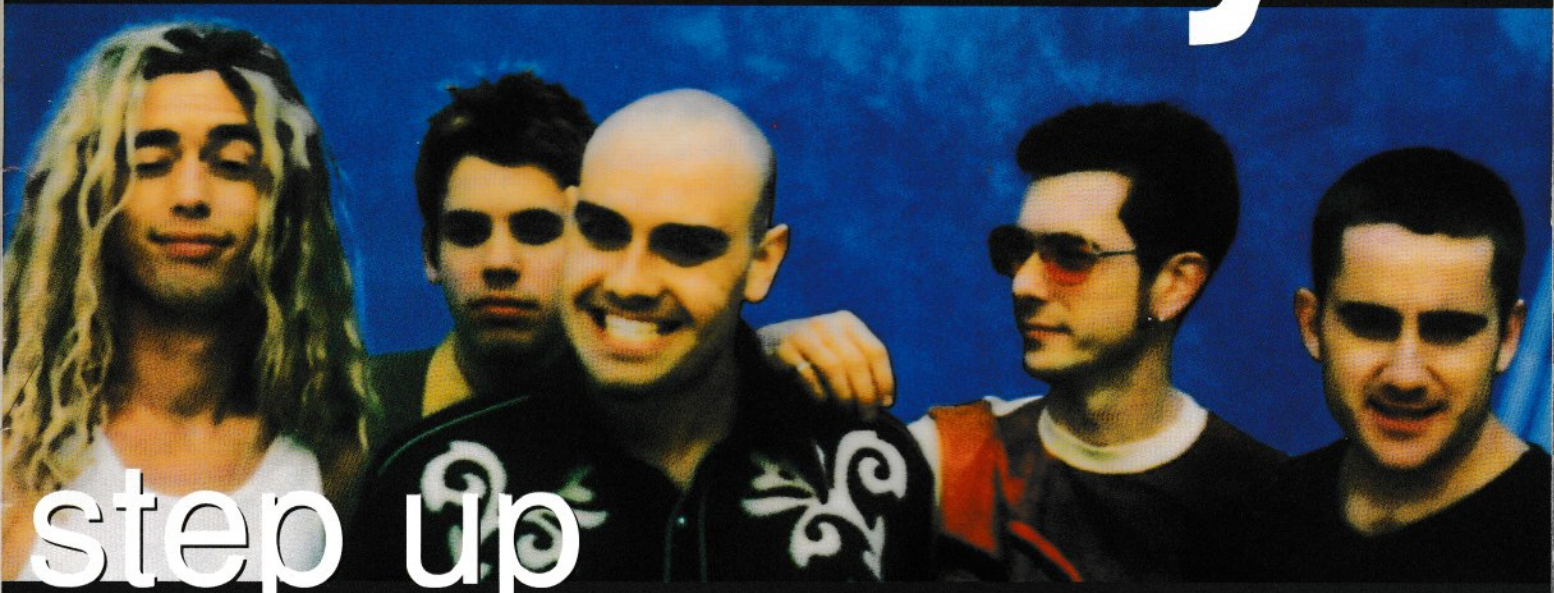
newsboys



step up to the microphone tour

petra

February with Petra

18	Pascagoula, MS	228-475-8244
19	Pensacola, FL	850-476-1932
20	Atlanta, GA	888-489-3378
26	Caronport, SK	306-756-3265
27	Calgary, ALB	604-943-2404
28	Edmonton, ALB	604-943-2404

March with Petra

2	Billings, MT	800-831-7940
3	Rapid City, SD	800-831-7940
4	Sioux City, IA	800-831-7940
6	Grand Forks, ND	800-831-7940
7	Duluth, MN	800-831-7940

March with Petra

11	Fayetteville, NC	910-323-5088
12	Bristol, TN	317-839-1092
13	Greenville, SC	864-801-9266
14	Florence, SC	843-679-4525
18	Austin, TX	210-657-7940
19	Amarillo, TX	806-378-3096
20	Midland, TX	915-570-5815
21	Enid, OK	580-237-0238
25	Orlando, FL	407-351-7625
26	Panama City, FL	336-887-3582
27	Valdosta, GA	912-559-1330
28	Greensboro, NC	336-373-7474

April with Supertones

1	Jackson, MS	601-856-0066
2	Houston, TX	713-799-8404
3	Dallas, TX	817-640-8900
9	Dodge City, KS	
10	Denver, CO	303 789 2911
12	Redding, CA	408-369-8222
13	Sacramento, CA	408-369-8222
14	Fresno, CA	408-369-8222
15	Santa Barbara, CA	800-245 9191
16	Las Vegas, NV	702-734-2223
17	Phoenix, AZ	408-369-8222
23	Murray, KY	
25	Saginaw, MI	937-642-7912
29	Muncie, IN	317-839-1092

May with Supertones

1	Rockford, IL	800-484-0918x8779
2	Ames, IA	800-484-0918x8779
7	Baltimore, MD	301-947-5560
8	Toronto, ON	800-484-0918x8779
9	Gr. Rapids, MI	800-484-0918x8779
11	Little Rock, AR	800-641-2048
13	Tupelo, MS	601-841-6528
14	Memphis, TN	901-377-3372
15	Nashville, TN	615-370-9296

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feedback

Your last issue said, "Letters, Email, Questions, Recipes," so here you go:

Caramel Layer Bars
14 oz. pkg. (about 50) light caramels
1/3 cup evaporated milk
1 pkg. Pillsbury German chocolate cake mix
3/4 cup butter or margarine, melted
another 1/3 evaporated milk
1 cup chopped nuts (optional)
6 oz. pkg. (1 cup) semi-sweet chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350 degrees, combine first 2 ingredients, cook over low heat. Combine in large bowl the rest except the choc. chips. Put 1/2 of dough into prepared pan. Bake at 350 for 6 minutes. Sprinkle choc. chips on baked crust. Spread caramel mixture on top of this, then crumble or glob reserved dough on top and bake for 15-20 minutes.

Ryan Killion
via the Internet

Thank you for putting The W's in the December issue. I appreciate you guys reaching out to young people. I am 17 and my biggest goal is to reach lost teens. Thank you for setting a godly example.

Ainsleigh Sills
Broken Arrow, OK

I'm very proud of you for having covered Starflyer 59 so soon after the release of their new album. But the W's on the cover? Come on, you folks just did a story on the W's two issues ago. That just reeks of trendiness to me.

Jeff Prime
via the Internet

I would just like to know why people think that it's a disgrace to Christianity for Christian bands to get air time on secular radio stations, or play in mainstream clubs and bars? If we Christians don't preach the Gospel to the unsaved, how will they hear? Why do people that are already born again need to have the Gospel preached to them over and over again? Is it the healed that need a physician or the sick?

Lydia Karstedt
via the Internet

I don't necessarily agree with everything every Christian band says, does, or represents, but that doesn't give me any right to judge them. So to all the kids reading this magazine: Don't let the opinions of some old guys who don't like our music because it doesn't sound like the gospel quartet that they grew up listening to influence the way you think.

Brian Hadaway
Nashville, TN

We happen to be big fans of The Cathedrals.

I was wondering if someone could enlighten me on the whole deal with "Jalapenos ... mmm ... jalapenos."

Emily Sprouse
Nashville, TN

Jalapenos. A taste sensation not to be denied.

Ever since the "Feedback" section of May/June *7ball*, I've been trying to figure out what Jalapeno sauce is.

Stephen Giambendino
Buffalo, NY

A taste sensation not to be denied.

I went to a Christian bookstore and saw *7ball*. I bought it and popped in the *GAS Collection* CD. I loved it! I also liked the magazine, too. I especially liked the articles about bands like The W's, Starflyer 59 and others.

Kevin Williams
Louisiana

To the reader who was upset about the "Blah, Blah, Blah" story about how you guys are always right: It's an editorial, an opinion, and Chris Well is entitled to his opinion, because it's his. As Christians, how can we show the love of God when we're too busy judging our fellow believers?

Elizabeth Harrison
Beaverton, OR

Hey, thanks for your cover story on the W's. I admit at first I didn't want to jump on the swing bandwagon, but hey, why should everyone else be having all the fun?

Ernesto Loza
via the Internet

Why do you guys put some of those mean remarks after letters people write to you? I think it's kind of rude!

Michelle
Alta Loma, CA

All I have to say is you rock and I love you.

Jordan Cook
Ontario, Canada

Well, you love and we rock you.

First of all, let me say I love the Mr. *7ball* comic. Don't get rid of it. Second, can you do an article on Switchfoot? Lastly, *Pecton*: a marine bivalve mollusk having a shell with diverging furrows.

Lee Veinot
New Hartford, NY

1) Watch for a special comic section on our website coming soon to a monitor near

you. 2) We'll try. 3) Shell: *Shotgun cartridge.*

The article on The Insyderz [#22, Jan/Feb '99] was great. To really understand where bands like The Insyderz and FIF are coming from, you have to meet them. I encourage everyone to stick

around after concerts and chat with band members.

Candy Young
Bloomington, IL

How many people have been signed to record deals because of your influence?

Kyle Horner
via the Internet

You think we have influence?

I am a MK in Japan. Could you do more contests? Also could you make the deadline a bit longer because by the time the mag gets to me it has already passed the deadline.

Silas Cole
via the Internet

Go ahead and send us an entry now. By the time it gets here, who knows.

I have one word to say: LOUD MUSIC!
(O.K., so it's two words.)
Terri Jordan
via the Internet

Insert your own "the effect loud music has on intelligence" joke here:

_____.

I have noticed that people without anything poignant to say on the topic of "Christian" music write to you every month and proclaim their judgmental position with full "Pharisee-like" fervor. These modern-day Pharisees look at certain bands as "selling out God" because they play mainstream shows. But just because you don't like what they are doing artistically gives you no right to judge their heart and where they are spiritually. Stop the premature judging of bands that may not fit in with your close-minded life. God is someone that can't be put in a legalistic box.

Joshua Hagquist
Redding, CA

I admit you guys have a good mag going, but you should keep down the bragging, and get focused.

Stafford Greer
via the Internet

You can't please all the people all the time, and last month all those people read 7ball.

Of course, music should be judged as music, but I think it is still important to look into the lifestyles of Christian artists. I want to make sure I'm not supporting an artist that is living a hypocritical life as a supposed "Christian artist."

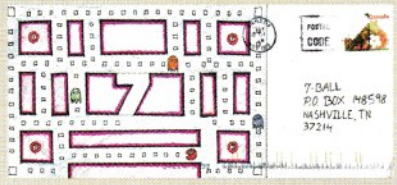
Jason Ernest
Queensland, Australia

I was just wondering how you guys got started and when was it that things took off for the company. I also wanted to say thanks for being obedient to what God had in store for *7ball*, and thanks for keeping up with it.

Nicole
via the Internet

We were all born not too long ago at a very young age, and the rest is history.

Thank you for *7ball*. Your magazine has always been interesting, helpful, insightful, well-done, and well-built for all listeners. It has also always been a bit too short, always a bit too cynical, and sometimes the articles are not something I care too deeply about.



K. Bozeman
via the Internet

Umm, thanks?

For your next "scene" (ska, dance, rap), you should do the punk scene!

Cassandra Block
Rochester Hills, MI

I would be ever so grateful if you would do an issue on hardcore. You know, No Innocent Victim, Zao, Training for Utopia, Embodyment, Eso Charis, etc. Yep, that would be pretty cool.

Emdeo Z,
via the Internet

In the Nov/Dec '98 mail, a reader claimed there is no such thing as Christian music, but in his letter he answered his own questions. He was right—there's no difference in chords, rhythm or style—but the fact is that Christian music is also judged on its spirituality, the very thing that sets it apart.

Jodie Eilers
via the Internet

Your magazine is a lot like my poodle. No, it's not. Forget that. But is there any way you could send me about 500 free *7ball* stickers? I am trying to make a *7ball* mobile. I will cover my car with them, and it will be a great ad for your company. I'll even paint "*www.7ball.com*" on the hood if you send me the stickers.

Joe Giachero
via the Internet

I was excited to see you cover the exciting "Dance" scene in the Christian music industry ["The [Dance] Report," #21 Nov/Dec '98]. It's great to get some exposure for this growing genre in the industry. By way of correction, however, I would like to offer a few suggestions. Dance music styles are pretty nebulous, so defining them can be a bit hard. That said, I disagree with a couple of the author's definitions: For Ambient/Trip-hop, the author wrote "there are usually no drums." However, one would be hard-pressed to find a trip-hop album without strong beats. Also, the author says that other names for Jungle/Drum & Bass are "breakbeats" or "hardcore." Without disputing the hardcore label, breakbeats does not specifically refer to the Jungle/Drum & Bass category. Breakbeats are any beats which are sampled, especially those beats which do

not follow a set 4-bar pattern. These are my understandings, anyway. The positive coverage far outweighed any difference in understandings. Keep up the good work, *7ball*.

David Wright
via the Internet

What materials are you people making your magazines with? The other day my girlfriend and I bought issue 21 at a bookstore. When we were driving home she opened it up to read it. We thought we had driven past a cow pasture. We suddenly realized that it wasn't the air that smelled bad, it was the magazine.

Mark Ellerbeck
East Alton, IL

Sadly, I don't think it was the paper you were smelling. It was the content.

I recently caught my 12-week-old puppy taking away my *7ball*. He not only stole the magazine but the CD as well. He loves it just as much as I do.

Grant Sabatzer
Falls Church, VA

He might have smelled something on it.

I love reading "Feedback" because of all the fun controversy and stuff, but I am noticing this fun being threatened by people that whine. I am a live-and-let-live kinda guy, but all this negative mail is getting me down. Then people write in saying that some mail printed is sinful or something because it isn't mature or cool (whatever that person's impression of cool is). You guys are doing a great job, not only at the interviews but at the tremendous job of keeping violence out of the mail bag.

Mel Millimen, Jr.
via the Internet

"Feedback" is on average, annoying. I like where people ask questions or give ideas, but a lot of it's just criticism.

Katherine McCormack
via the Internet

You guys put too many letters in your feedback that glorify you, not God. It's not about you.

Caleb Jones
via the Internet

You guys are raising an army. Maybe the only reason you print those "We Hate *7ball*" letters is because they always illicit thousands of other letters saying, "Whoever hates *7ball* is a fool. Tell us their name and we'll kill 'em." This gives you an effective count of just how many kids are willing to do your bidding. Admit your sickening plot, and I'll refrain from alerting Washington officials.

Jeremiah Wentz
Pasadena, MD

The crow flies at midnight.

I don't like you guys who pollute my favorite mag with complaints about stupid stuff.

Matt Walker
via the Internet

I want to thank you for you the "Blah Blah Blah" in the Jan./Feb. issue. I too have a dream that I've been struggling with lately. Is it my own selfish vision, or is it God's direction for my life? Cameron Strang's article was so encouraging to read at this stage in my life. It's reassuring to know I'm not the only one struggling through this dilemma. So I wanted to personallly thank you for sharing your heart. I know it toched mine.

Rebekka Lawrence
via snail mail

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Sherri Youngward with Justin McRoberts February
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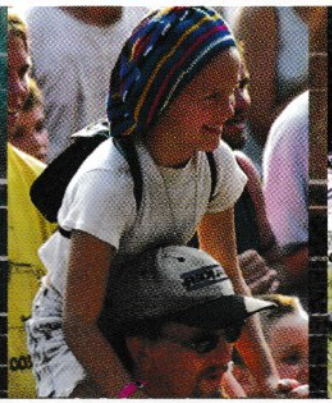

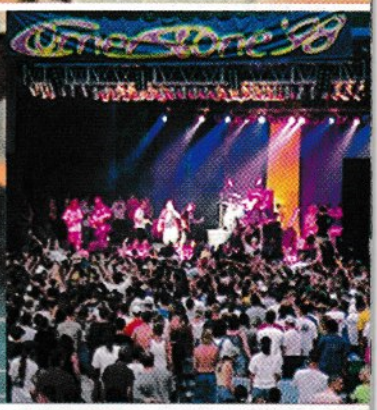

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penpals

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7ball Bullpen Bulletins

ITEM: Christian rappers made waves this fall on MTV's *Star Search*-type talent show, *The Cut*. Both **Ill Harmonics** and **T-Bone** made the final 10 out of 160 hopefuls. On each show a panel of judges, voting on everything from image to crowd interaction, decided which one out of four performers advanced to the next round. Several Christian artists, including **E-roc**, appeared on the show, but only T-Bone and Ill Harmonics made the final cut. Ill Harmonics ended up with a final score of 21.5 (out of 30) for their song "Will I," and T-Bone fared a little better (23.5) for his cut "Demon Killa." The judges on the final show were producer/songwriter David Foster of 143 Records, hip-hop pioneer KRS-One and R&B group Dru Hill.

ITEM: Rockabilly group **Ruby Joe** will release their sophomore project March 23 on Sub•Lime Records. The Ventura, Calif., band, which boasts a female drummer and bassist, offers a traditional rock 'n' roll/rockabilly sound similar to **The Brian Setzer Orchestra**. Recorded in Santa Barbara, Calif., the album features the horn section of classic swing band **Royal Crown Review**.

ITEM: **Halo Friendlies**, the only all-girl alternative band we know of in Christian music, is scheduled to play on the "Warped Tour" starting in July. The band is also exploring other touring opportunities with several major general market bands. Check out their new 5-song EP in March on Jackson Rubio.

ITEM: **The OC Supertones** played for the Pope Jan. 26 in St. Louis, along with **dc Talk** and **Rebecca St. James**. The event was covered by worldwide media. The Pope was covered by a robe and tall hat.

ITEM: If you know anything about the underground college music scene, you probably know about **Waterdeep**. The Kansas City-based group has been wowing audiences throughout the Midwest with their worshipful, funky, rootsy Americana and atmospheric rock. Recently, the group decided to come above-ground and signed to Squint Entertainment, home of **Sixpence** and **Burlap To Cashmere**. Look for an album late summer/early fall.

ITEM: If you like your electronic rock dark and loud, you really need to meet the folks at Blacklight Records. They have new music out or on the way from: **Blackhouse,** 20-year veterans of industrial music for fans of Kraftwerk or Nitzer Ebb; **Fatal Blast Whip,** who create dark gothic electronica in the vein of Front 242; and **Torn Skin,** a post-industrial band categorized with the likes of KMFDM and Gravity Kills. *www.blacklight.com*

ITEM: For those of you asking about **Blackball**, here's the deal: They have new songs, they've been playing them for audiences in L.A., and they hope to record soon.

ITEM: Much-loved **dc Talk** is in the midst of their 65-date arena tour for *Supernatural*, with **Jennifer Knapp** and **The W**'s opening.

"*Supernatural* is a passionate record, but after being holed up in the studio for over a year we are ready to explode," says Toby McKeehan. Key stops include Chicago and Minneapolis in March; Kansas City and Houston in April; and New York and Virginia Beach in May. *www.dcTalk.com*

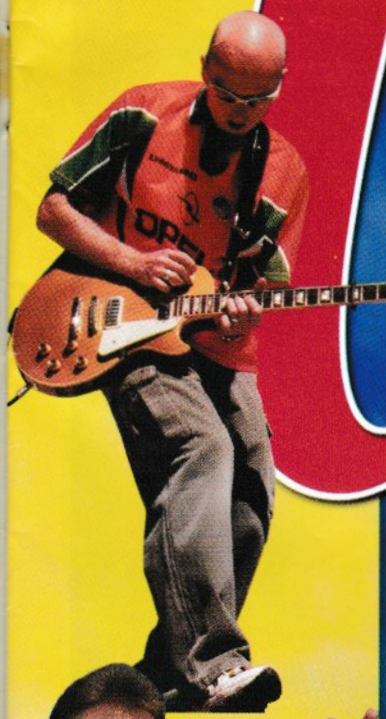
ITEM: Survey results show that *7ball* readers love us or they hate us. Or they think we're OK.

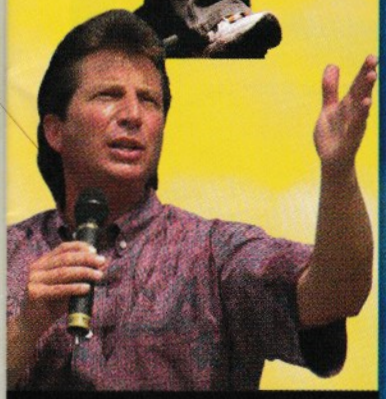
ITEM: When **One Hundred Days** took their fab new *The Super Terrific Happy Hour* (the title could be a little peppier) out to play for Canadian audiences, they recorded a couple of shows for personal use. They were pleased enough with the results they might release it as a live CD. To keep up on the band, swing by their website, *www.golden.net/~tanrocks*.

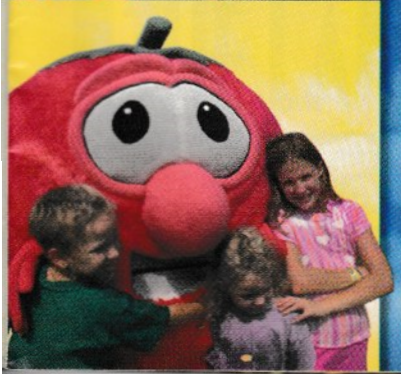
ITEM: Our pals Kim and Jim Thomas, otherwise known as **Say-So,** have a new CD in stores soon, *Still Waters,* with 10 songs and two poetry segments. In April look for Kim's book, *Simplicity: Finding Peace By Uncluttering Your Life*, an artful look at simplifying body, soul and spirit. The Thomases lately have been leading a weekly Bible study for thinkers, called "Watershed," in the Nashville area. Look for the duo on the road soon in Ft. Worth, Texas, and Mobile, Ala. *members.aol.com/saysofans*

ITEM: The *Pure Rock Report* has been replaced by the *Progressive Airplay Journal*. The only change *7ball* readers will see is the combining of the *PRR*'s "Modern Rock" and "Rock" charts to create a new "Progressive Rock" chart. The "Loud" and "Rhythmic" charts remain unchanged. No word yet on the status of the proposed "Polka Praise" chart. *http://purerock.net*

ITEM: **Room Full of Walters** was returning from a series of concerts in Colorado







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5 Minute Walk Celebrates

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ITEM: Sure, 5 Minute Walk (and sub-label SaraBellum) have plenty to celebrate. **Five Iron Frenzy** continues to sell like gangbusters. **The W's** are breaking sales records left and right. And the label has just hit its fourth anniversary, celebrated by the double-disc *Five Minute Walk Records Greatest Hits (1995-1999)*.

But the biggest reason to celebrate is the kids. The 5 Minute Walk House, in Tijuana, Mexico, is feeding 160 kids a day. "They get a hot meal and a dessert five days a week," says **Frank Tate**, owner of the Concord, Calif., label. "And we just opened the clinic, so anyone in the village can get medical attention."

The house has always been part of the plan: From the beginning, if you bought a ticket to see a 5MW band, part of that ticket price went toward the project. The first phase was to "Buy The Land;" they purchased a 12,000 sq. ft. lot, which the church down there owns now. The second phase was to "Build The House;" the 5 Minute Walk House has been up almost three years now. The next phase was to "Feed The Kids;" this ongoing project pays for the cook and all the food. The clinic was paid for by profits from the label sampler *Take Time To Listen III*, some $20,000.

The 5MW family has done other benefit tours as well, such as the "Five Bucks And A Blanket Tour," which collected nearly 3,000 blankets for local homeless shelters. For the "20,000 Jackets Tour," you got into the show free in exchange for a new or secondhand jacket, sweater or sweatshirt. Then there was the "Rock Your Socks Off Tour," where concertgoers were encouraged to bring socks or shoes, which were donated to local homeless shelters. "That was a hard one," Tate says, "because you wouldn't believe how smelly those shoes are. The trailer reeked."

The benefit tours have been a good anchor to make sure the label is doing more than paying lip service to "ministry." As Jeremy Post, formerly of Black Eyed Sceva (one of 5MW's first bands), told *7ball* in summer '96, "If we're going to call this *Christian music*, then it should be doing something Christ-like."

The label's anniversary present, the double-disc, 30-track *5 Minute Walk Records Greatest Hits (1995-1999)*, covers the label's history well. The discs also include two bonus CD-ROM videos, "A Flowery Song" from Five Iron Frenzy and "The Devil Is Bad" from The W's.

when they were involved in a multi-car crash Dec. 20 that virtually destroyed their equipment trailer and damaged their van. "Thank goodness only the replaceable was damaged," guitarist Mark Scheltgen said. Look for the band's soph album late spring.

ITEM: Christian music webzine *Ricochet* is now weekly. The 'zine (found at *www.ricochetmusic.com*) features band spotlights, reviews, tour dates and music news. (But you still have to promise to swing by *www.7ball.com*.)

ODDS & ENDS: **Shaded Red** fans, unite! The band is currently in the studio recording their highly anticipated sophomore effort, *Red Revolution*, slated for early June. The guys even recorded a remake of Benny Hester's "When God Ran" in London with the London Philharmonic Orchestra ... **Reality Check** fans, disband! The band is calling it quits after their label dissolved and their lead singer left ... **All Star United** just launched the 40-city "Big Rock Show" tour with **Silage** and **The Normals**. The tour will run through the second week of May ... **Broomtree** just wrapped their soph project, *Transparent*, due March 23. They're touring this spring with **Temple Yard** and **Petra** (the legends literally and figuratively synonymous with "rock") ... **Christafari**'s first project with its totally new crew, *WordSound&Power*, will release later this spring ... **Miss Angie** is in the studio working on her upcoming 2nd project, tentatively titled *Triumphantine* ... The new **GRITS** album hits shelves in May ... Watch for the debut of **Wedding Party**, the next generation in goth/ industrial/ alternative with deep, spiritual lyrics driven by beautiful female vocals, accompanied by powerful guitar riffs and keyboards ... **Plankeye** is in the studio recording their follow-up to *The One and Only* ... **Aleixa** has vinyl remixes of "Await," produced by Deep Sky (who also remixed The Echoing Green's "Power Cosmic"), hitting club audiences in March.

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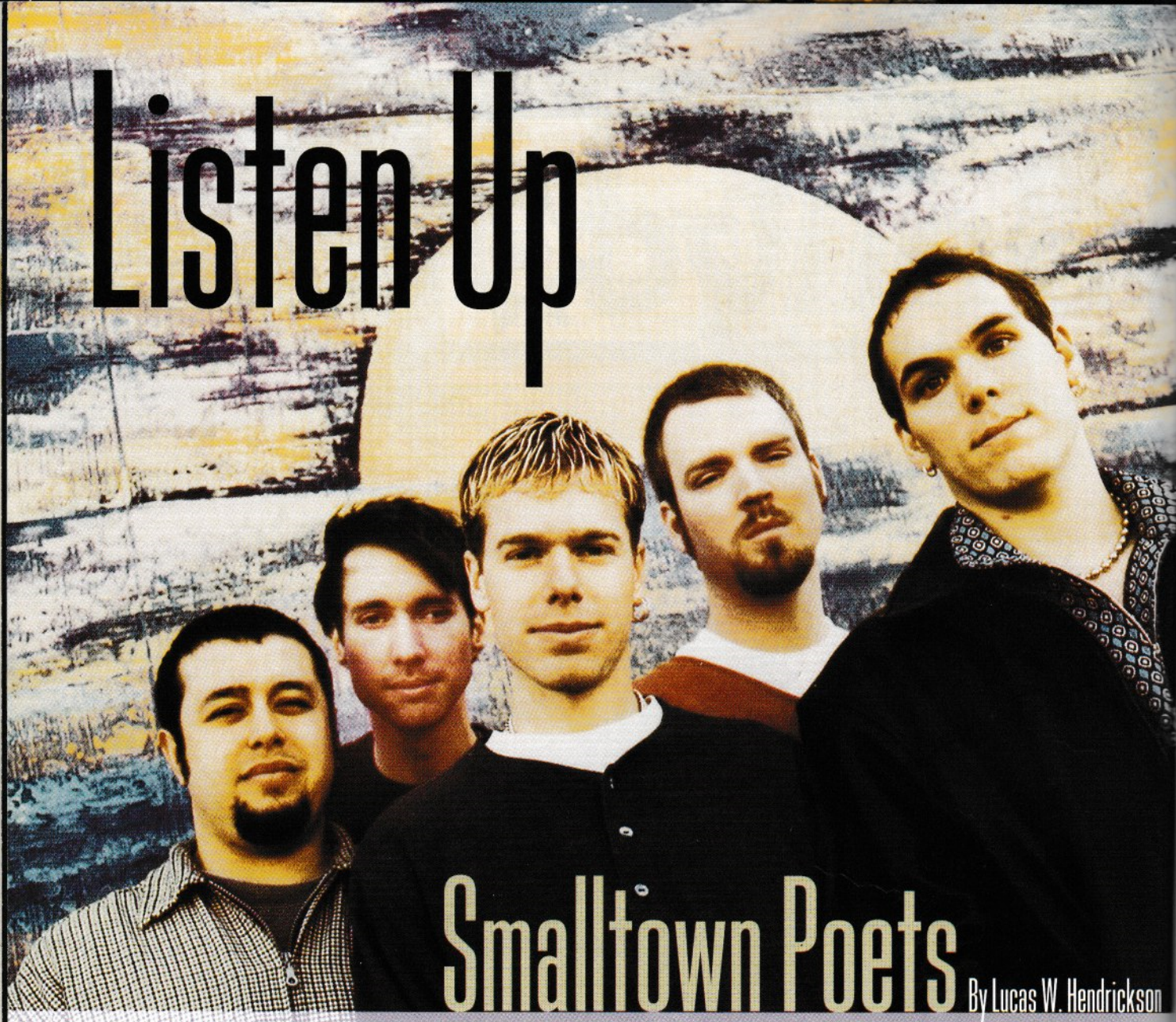

Smalltown Poets

By Lucas W. Hendrickson

You think you have the Poets figured out? Pay attention.

Spend enough time looking closely at the back of your hand, and you'll discover a universe of detail. Criss-crossing lines that give the skin its flexibility. The delicate pattern of hair covering the surface. The tendons, joints and veins just under that surface which provide mobility. All of which suggest the development of the hand can't just be an accident.

Spend enough time listening closely to an album, and you'll discover the same thing about the music. Nothing that goes on the final product is an accident. Oh, sure, there are moments of serendipity that make it onto the finished disc because the band or the producer or the guy who cleans the studio thought it was cool and it was left on but, for the most part, everything's there for a reason.

Such is the case with Smalltown Poets' sophomore effort, *Listen Closely*, where the five-man band decided to take a divergent path and make an album with enough texture that one has to do exactly what the title suggests.

For example, there's the guitar lead line at the beginning of the song "Quasar." "There's an instrument that [bassist] Miguel [DeJesus] learned when he was really young living in Puerto Rico called a *quatro*," says the Poets' lead vocalist/guitarist Michael Johnston. "It's kinda like a mandolin and kinda like a guitar. So putting that with an electric guitar on 'Quasar' gives it a feel that's a little unexpected."

The Poets experienced a fair amount of success with their debut, a self-titled record of straightforward alt-rock songs that caught the attention of not only the record-buying and radio-listening publics, but also industry insiders who gave them a Grammy nomination, three Dove Award nominations and a *Billboard* Video Award.

When it came time to make the second record, Johnston says the band members went in with a heightened confidence that came only from time together on the road. "We had played so many shows that we were all better players, and I think we brought better songs," he says. "We were able to collaborate more as a band on this record, and I think that makes it stronger."

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On the first record, this lineup had only been together about five months. "Kevin didn't have much of a chance to influence the songwriting on the first record," Johnston says, "but on this one, it's one of the main differences. He had a lot to do with laying the groundwork for songs.

band room, and it just had this vibe to it that we thought would be fun to pursue for the record."

But the instrumentation does more than just sound cool. The music, Johnston says, also ministers. "There are so many different ways God can use to speak to the soul," he says. "Music seems to be one of those art forms, one of those ways God uses to speak to me. I appreciate good music so much, it doesn't matter what style it is. To me, I see reflections of God in that. We like to think of ourselves as musicians and creators of something, but the long and short of it is God is *the* Creator and anything we do is an imitation of that. When you see art and something that is well crafted, it's moving to me because it's a reflection of who God is."

"We were getting really anxious to have another record out, but we felt like it was best to just try and take our time," Michael Johnston says.

Besides that, we all have grown as far as the vocabulary of influences we have to draw on. That's one reason this record has some different moments on it. I won't say it's unfocused, because everything we did was intentional, but it does have a good bit of variety."

But the summer of '98 came and went, and still no second Smalltown project was in sight. Johnston says the group's quick success made it somewhat difficult to finish *Listen Closely*. "We travel so much, the whole process of writing for the record and being in the studio was a challenge," he says. "It was really important for us to make the best record we could, so we tried not to rush it. We had hopes of getting it out in October, but came to realize that wasn't feasible. We were going to sell ourselves a little short if we tried to do that. We were getting really anxious to have another record out, but we felt like it was best to just try and take our time."

And taking their time meant experimenting with new and different sounds, sonic elements the young-and-evolving Poets couldn't have tried on their first record. But confidence is a wonderful thing, especially when it's not only in your talent but also in your producer—in this case, John Hampton.

"[Hampton's] thing is, he just likes to take a snapshot of the band. He doesn't try to be a heavy-handed producer and come in with an agenda. We felt like our communication with him was a lot better for this record," Johnston says.

Hampton encouraged the band to flesh out songs like "Quasar" and "48 States," which have a little different feel than the Matchbox 20-clone songs so many bands seem to be adopting these days. In particular, "48 States," with its ticky-tack, pseudo-ragtime piano and drum corps percussion, provides a welcome breather from the "two guitar, bass, drums, keys" rock setup.

They started writing for the record while out on the *Threads* tour with Geoff Moore, and often found themselves in a church here, a high school there, an auditorium somewhere else. "So we were writing in whatever band room or choir room we could set up our gear in," Johnston recalls. "I remember being in some high school band room and Danny sat down and started playing this little piano riff and I'm like, *Man, that's really cool.* We started hitting on things that were sitting around us in that

For the members of Smalltown Poets, seeing how their work affects the people they come in contact with is yet another exercise of looking closely at their surroundings. "It never seems to be a huge moment of epiphany, it's little things that start to stack up," Johnston says. "Letters, emails, people at a show communicating to us how songs on the record have helped them understand their relationship with God over time.

"That's really cool, because it's one thing for people to enjoy the music, but it's another for somebody to have been helped to understand things. That's moving to us. There are so many folks who pour into our lives when we're out on the road, people we wouldn't meet otherwise. Through relationships like that, we're able to grow in our walk with God and understand things about life we wouldn't see otherwise. It's amazing how God works wherever we are."

There's a joke among the band members that, when things are most chaotic, God comes in and says, *Good, this is where I can come in and really control things.* "Because nobody knows what to do because there's so much chaos," Johnston says. "Our goal is to hopefully make a difference in the world. Trying to do all of these things at the same time really does give God opportunities to work because we're at a loss as to what to do. It's in those moments where God helps us realize our inadequacies and makes us really happy to be part of this."

It's in those moments where you have to be still—and listen closely to what God is saying 7

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ELECTRONIC ROCK

Joy Electric

Don't be fooled by the synths, Joy Electric is a rock band.

By Dan MacIntosh

Much like the proverbial bull in a china shop, Joy Electric continues to smash neatly ordered Christian rock stereotypes into short, sharp, shocking shards of multi-colored glass. A typical Joy Electric performance sees the keyboardist-and-singer duo, without a bassist or guitarist in sight (and sometimes even *sans* drummer), sandwiched on a bill between unlikely stagemates like punk-rockers MxPx and ska-poppers The Supertones. Guitar solos are replaced by percolating synthesizer bleeps and buzzes, and lyrics are sung softly, not shouted. The group holds its own, steadfastly presenting retro synth sounds as if Depeche Mode and The Human League still rule the pop charts.

"Basically, we play whatever shows we can," keyboardist Jeff Cloud says. "A lot of our fans actually tell us stuff like, *You and Ninety-Pound Wuss* or *You and Stavesacre are my favorite bands*. We think that's cool."

"The kids that come to our shows have varied a lot over the past couple years," singer Ronnie Martin says. "We get a lot of punk and hardcore kids now who are really into us."

Onstage, Cloud hovers over his array of keys. Martin coils his right hand around the mic stand and rocks it like a compulsive gambler working the slots in Vegas, while his left hand hangs limply at his side. The dudes in the audience nod their heads with the music, while the girls giggle at finally discovering a band they can dance to.

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Christiansongs, and while this new outing mainly covers familiar Joy Electric musical territory—with a style popularized primarily in the '80s—its spiritual intentions go all the way back to the very roots of contemporary Christian music. "*Christiansongs* represents us as a band going back to the old ideas and purposes that the original bands of the scene had in the late '70s to the mid-'80s," Martin explains.

When he talks, the soft-spoken Martin—who also writes the songs and plays synths on the records—has the same tenderness in his speaking voice that is found in his singing. "I don't believe God ever said that ministry and music could be mutually exclusive things," he says. "The old bands understood this, and they backed it up with a mission to affect kids lives through true Christianity. The current scene seems to be more concerned with how they're perceived by the mainstream than with being 'rebels for Jesus.'"

Martin has applied a high standard to Joy Electric's new album and views this project as a definitive statement from the duo. "*Christiansongs* is an attempt to put out an end-of-the-decade masterpiece, in terms of songs, vision and style," he says. "It's very crafted. Lyrically, it's very direct in some places, and sort of well-read in others. I always want to make a big statement, and the emphasis on this album was to take everything we do, both musically and lyrically, and blow it out of proportion."

While Joy Electric sculpts music like an artist molds sculptures, the guys never let artistic goals get in the way of touching their audience on a spiritual level. "We make our music for other Christians to enjoy," Cloud says. "I think we are definitely called to be ministry-oriented. If an unbeliever hears it and likes it, cool, but our intention is to give Christian kids music that is legit."

Joy Electric approaches the recording process with the precision and perfectionism of a surgeon. "I am obsessed with the idea of achieving the perfect music," Martin says. "I like music to sound like the inside of a clock—perfect, interlinking, rigid and mechanical. That's why I record the music one note at a time, and shape sounds into a metronomic whole."

Don't let all this attention to detail make you think that Martin is shooting for something too complex for the average music fan, though. "I still want the music to be perceived for what it is: pop, pure pop," he says. "The most important music made is always going to be pop. We're pop with a nice twist."

Sonically, Joy Electric takes a few pinches from the past and adds a few new wrinkles. "I've learned a lot over the past few albums," Martin says, "so I've tried to take the best bits of the previous records and combine those ideas to form one great record."

With keyboard-dominated groups like Stereolab and The Pulsars making waves in the underground rock scene, it would make perfect commercial sense for Joy Electric to jump on the resurgent synthesizer bandwagon. But Joy Electric is not just a synth group; it's more of a synth group with a rock attitude. "Joy Electric is a rock band," Martin says. "We make rock music with synthesizers."

Martin prides himself on being a dedicated songwriter, and songwriters are rarely given much respect within the nerdy electronic music community. "We don't play raves; we write songs," he says. "I listen to all different styles of music, so that's why we primarily bring rock and indie bands with us on tour. It's just another way to show how anti-techno we are."

The guys have adopted that mentality so much, in fact, that Cloud also tag-teams as part of critically acclaimed Starflyer 59, which is, well, a band with guitars. "The situations are different in instrumentation, but the two groups don't feel very different to me," Cloud says. "The song structures are basically the same, and it's my job to just play songs."

At the core of it all, Joy Electric just plays songs. Martin's belief in the legitimacy of electronic groups who write real songs was the impetus for him to start his label, Plastiq Musiq. "I started it a year and half ago for electronic bands who write songs," he says. "I want bands who are doing innovative music in an electronic vein, whether it includes trip-hop, drum and bass, techno, house or whatever. The point is that it's song-oriented, rather than emphasizing beats and bass lines."

The label has gotten off to a good start and already sports a roster which includes House of Wires, Goodnight Star and Norway.

Joy Electric will probably always stand out on any Christian music festival bill, and, no matter how seriously they take their music, they'll always remain a bit of a novelty act. And that's just fine with them. "We're always facing an uphill battle against those who measure the worth of a band by the number of guitar players they have," Martin says. "Obviously, we fall a little short there."

Joy Electric may be a little deficient in the guitar player department, but they're loaded to the gills with style, substance and class. And they rock. 7

Pete Stewart
the self-titled debut

produced by dc Talk's Michael Tait

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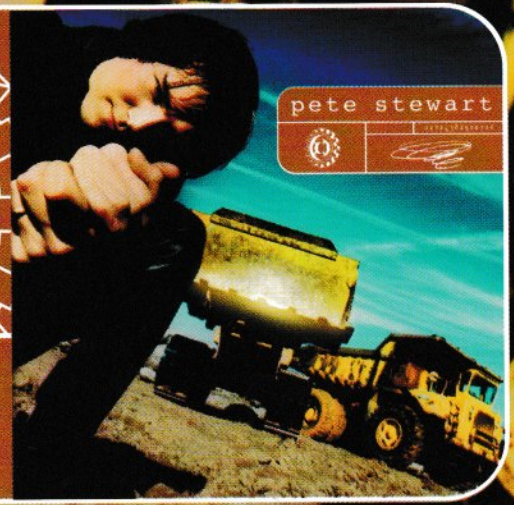

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OUT TO SAVE THE WORLD

Five Iron Frenzy may be hard to label—outrageous, outsiders, outspoken—but there's no questioning their passion.

By Nancy VanArendonk with Thompson Brooks

"It was just this crazy idea we had," bassist Keith Hoerig explains. "At the end of any studio session if we had extra tape, we used it. So we were like, *Let's do a rock opera and call it 'These Are Not My Pants!'*"

"We should have recorded it on video and then released *that*, because that would have been even funnier," adds saxophonist Leanor "Jeff the Girl" Ortega. "The faces that people were making in the studio were amazing."

Meet Five Iron Frenzy. It should come as no surprise the same eight-member ska-punk unit from Denver that conceived *Upbeats And Beatdowns* and *Our Newest Album Ever!* would feature an impromptu "rock opera" on its current release, the EP *Quantity Is Job 1*. "We each had only one shot in the studio and whatever you sang was kept, so we were all on adrenaline kicks," Ortega says. "It was awesome."

"All the music for 'Pants,' came off a computer," Hoerig explains. "We were each assigned a musical style—for instance, I was assigned heavy metal—and you went into the booth and that was it. It was

totally improv; nothing was written in advance. You just went in and sang."

FIF has seen its popularity grow beyond anything any of the members anticipated three-and-a-half years ago when the group formed. "For me personally, this [success] wasn't even a goal," Hoerig says. "My original goal for Five Iron was just to be a good local band—to be able to go as a Christian band and open for non-Christian bands at clubs in the Colorado area, just to do ministry there."

"I don't think any of us saw this coming," says Reese Roper, the group's lead vocalist and chief lyricist. "We were surprised we could make money at this—you know, that we could actually get money to pay for our equipment."

Five Iron Frenzy was born out of a foursome consisting of Roper, Hoerig and guitarists Micah Ortega and Scott Kerr, who were a thrash band called Exhumator (you can't make stuff like this up, kids). "We got kind of bored," Hoerig says. "We had a sampler and drum machine and sounded like Circle of Dust, Mortal and early Nine Inch Nails."

In spring of 1995 they started FIF as a simple side project, picking up drummer Andrew Verdecchio and trumpeter Brad Dunham. "It started out as punk with very little ska," Roper says, "but we liked the ska sound so we decided to go more for it."

The band derived its name from an incident with a friend who, on a particular night, was going out and decided to take a golf club to protect himself from attack. When he remarked that it would be a case of "putter mayhem," Kerr noted the kind of club the friend was holding and retorted, "No, more like a *five iron frenzy*."

There are stories about those early gigs, including the time they crashed the Cornerstone Festival. "They had a generator and set up at the skateboard ramp," trombonist Dennis Culp says. "It was totally illegal."

By the end of that summer, Ortega's cousin, Leanor (who picked up the nickname "Jeff" from a role she played in a church camp play in sixth grade) and Culp joined, and the 8-piece ska band was on its way, playing some 60 shows in eight months and opening for all sorts of ska and punk bands.

It was at a Halloween 1995 show that they got the attention of 5 Minute Walk's Frank Tate, when they opened for his bands Dime Store Prophets and Black Eyed Sceva. He signed 'em pronto.

Since then, FIF's raucous brand of ska-pop hasn't just taken Christian kids by storm, it's also plugged the band into the mainstream, including an appearance on the general market sampler *Cheap Ska* (alongside several popular ska bands, as well as fellow Christian ska band The O.C. Supertones). It's noteworthy that *Cheap Ska* also included the band Jeffries Fan Club, whose Sonnie Johnston recently joined FIF to replace the exiting Kerr on guitar.

FIF was the only Christian band on last year's "Ska Against Racism" tour, which included Reel Big Fish, Less Than Jake and The Toasters, among others. "That tour was a good opportunity," Hoerig says. "The tour was seven weeks long and pretty much hit the whole country. It was a blast."

"This band can cross over to the secular market," Tate told *Billboard*, "but not only because they're amazing musicians whom I'd put on stage with anybody, They're Christian to the core, but the focus is to show that being Christian isn't weird—it's just having a friendship with Christ. It's like Michael Jackson—people say he's a performer, not a *Jehovah's Witness performer.*"

Roper says that while their message may not be readily accepted, the music should be good enough to overcome whatever prejudice. "We just have to work hard and sell people on the music."

Even with the attention of the secular marketplace, the members of FIF refuse to dance around the fact they are Christians. "I'm so tired of reading interviews about bands and they're like, *Don't call us a Christian band,*" Roper told *True Tunes News*. "We are who we are and God has given us this truth and it's changed our lives and we cannot be silent. We have to go out and tell people about it."

He does, however, have a problem with writing songs with a formula or agenda. "When we write our songs we try to be authentic and let people know that Jesus is our Savior and there is not a day in our lives that isn't different because of His Lordship over our lives. But we still struggle like anyone else. I hope our music is good enough to appeal to everyone, because I would like to be able to share with them about

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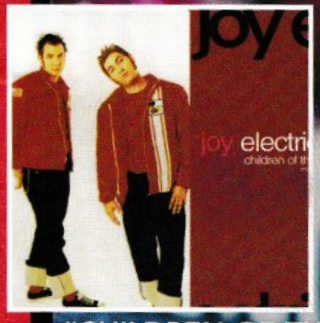

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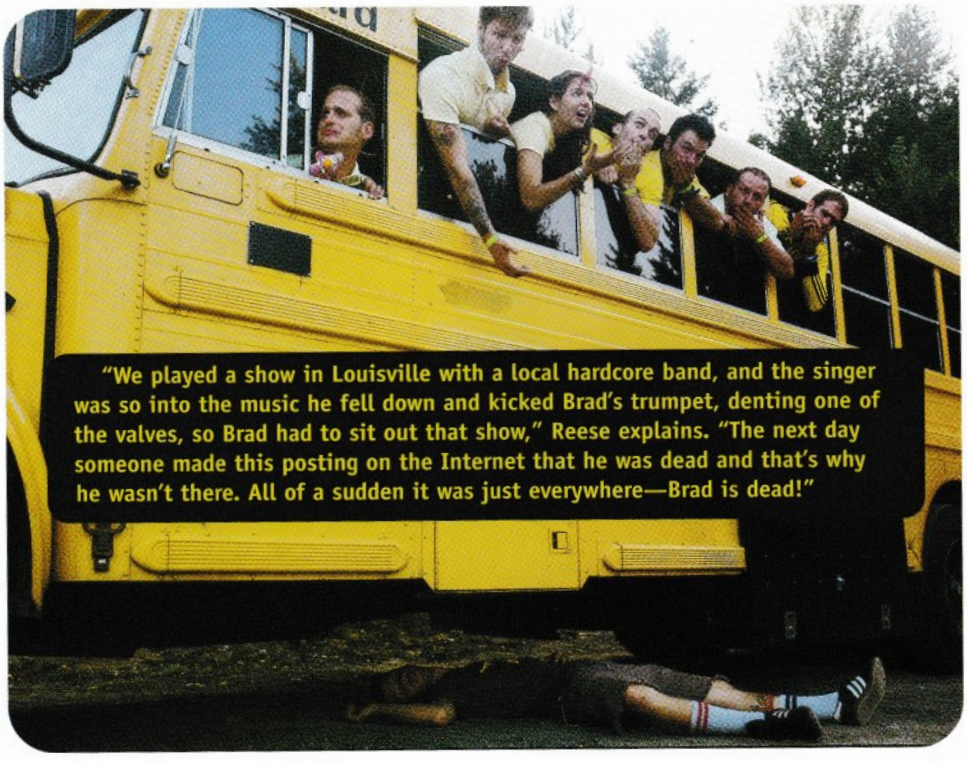
the changes God is making in our lives."

Dunham says the ministry sometimes comes from the stage, as they praise God through the music and show kids they can have fun and give their music to God. "But sometimes our ministry is offstage, just talking to the kids and being real with them and showing them that we're just like they are."

Culp agrees that the important thing is being relevant—both through their interactions with fans and through the art. "When I was younger, contemporary Christian music did not appeal to me at all. It didn't seem relevant. The time you praise God is definitely important, but that's not all there is to life. There's a need to be silly, a need to struggle, and that's always seemed more real to me. But our faith is definitely part of everything we do; we sing what's on our heart."



"We played a show in Louisville with a local hardcore band, and the singer was so into the music he fell down and kicked Brad's trumpet, denting one of the valves, so Brad had to sit out that show," Reese explains. "The next day someone made this posting on the Internet that he was dead and that's why he wasn't there. All of a sudden it was just everywhere—Brad is dead!"

All of those elements—the spirituality, the struggles and, yes, the silliness—are quite evident on *Quantity Is Job 1*. For example, there's the song "The Untimely Death of Brad," which (if you stretch a bit) is ultimately about the dangers of the Internet in today's tabloid culture. "We played a show in Louisville with a local hardcore band," Reese explains, "and the singer was so into the music that he fell down and kicked Brad's trumpet, denting one of the valves, so Brad had to sit out that show."

The next day someone posted on the Internet that he was dead and that's why he wasn't there. "All of a sudden it was just everywhere—*Brad is dead!* It seemed there were always new rumors about it," Reese says. "So last year at the Ichthus festival somebody was filling in for Brad and we were saying, [in a somber voice] *Brad has gone home to be with his father*. He was at his sister's wedding. *He's in a much better place*. It was silly."

In addition to just-for-fun tracks like "When I Go Out" ("We have a tradition of having track six be a goofy track," Hoerig says) and "Kingdom Of The Dinosaurs" (invented while standing in line for an amusement park ride), there are thoughtful songs on the project. "Dandelions," as Hoerig explains, "is a story about a kid who picks a bunch of flowers for his mom and gives them to her. They're really just weeds, but to her it's something beautiful because it was done in love. The things that we have to offer to God are weeds, but He receives them in love."

Then there's "All That Is Good," for which Ortega wrote the lyrics. "We were on the 'Ska Against Racism' tour with a bunch of secular bands," she says, "and we were striving to show Christ to people in the way we acted. A lot of that song is about the struggle you feel—*Is any of this doing any good? Do they see God when they see us?* That's one thing the song is about; the other is how a lot of Christians are afraid to ask questions that are hard to answer, for fear it will jostle their faith. I guess people assume God isn't big enough to answer their doubts."

And, of course, there's the legendary eight-song song cycle "These Are Not My Pants," which includes swipes at country & western, heavy metal, reggae, samba, rap, some kind of hip-hop/jazz thing, plus pastiches of Gloria Estefan (we think) and Bruce Springsteen (we're pretty sure).

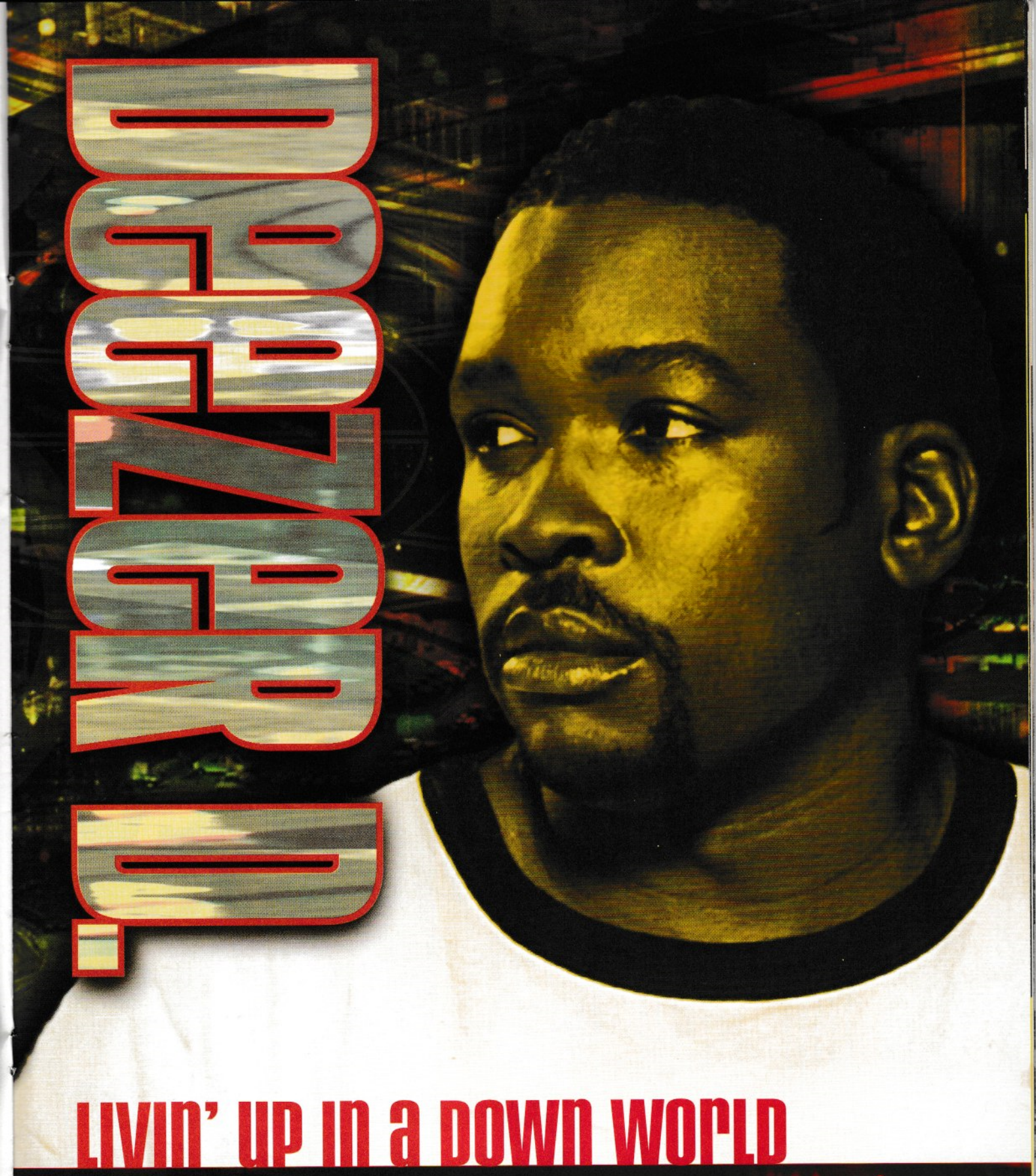
The main reason it's an EP ("extended play") and not an LP ("long play") is simple: They've been on the road. A lot. "Since we've been on tour so much, it's been more difficult to write," Roper says. "But we thought it'd be cool to get the songs we did have out there so people would have some new music."

You wouldn't think they'd have the time, but the band is already writing new material for their next project. "Micah and Dennis have been writing a lot of new songs," Ortega says. "I really like some of the stuff they're writing—it's more punk. I requested it. I like all kinds of music, but I like the punk edge. It seems like we have a lot of songs already."

The band is probably at a show right this moment—Five Iron Frenzy spends as many as 250 days a year on the road. "I haven't seen my friends or family for weeks," Hoerig says. Last fall, they did shows with The O.C. Supertones and The Insyders. Earlier this year, they took off for Australia and New Zealand. They had some time off in Hawaii and a few days at home in February, but hit the road hard again in March.

"I miss my friends when I'm on the road, but this is definitely something we feel is a ministry," Hoerig says. "We hope we can serve the people we meet on the road, whether it be people at the shows or security guards at some club or even just each other. We feel we need to serve people. I think it's a lot of fun.

"We should be asking the kids for *their* autographs, because many of them have a lot to offer us spiritually," saxophonist Ortega adds. "They don't realize how much ministry they do to us just by talking and hanging out with us, praying for us and telling us they're praying for us, or in writing letters. The letters we get are really encouraging. I want to thank them for that because I don't think there'd be a point in doing this if we weren't getting all that feedback. It's cool." 7



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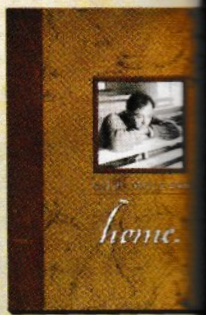

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12. **GLISTEN** "Mothership" KMG Records 4:13
(written by Glisten) © 1998 Broken Songs (ASCAP)
Glisten frontman Jason Pettit says the song "Mothership" is about "the return of Christ and the longing of Christians for that day. The idea behind the song comes from the sense of longing when you look at the stars." This Texas-based band's debut is *Starlight Wish* (KMG).

13. **BLAH** "145" Bulletproof Music 2:11
(written by A. Rosas, J. Carlson) © 1998 Gray Dot Songs (ASCAP)/ Tomorrow Or The Next Day (BMI)
Blah's music merges the modern pop-punk style of bands like MxPx and Green Day with '50s surf music and rockabilly to create a genre all their own. The band's mission is to preach the Gospel through quality, original music. Blah's self-titled sophomore album is available from Bulletproof.

SOMEBODY SIGN THESE GUYS:

14. **THE PRIMROSES** "She Said" 4:01
(written by J. Rose) © 1997 The Primroses
The four members of The Primroses met at Colorado Christian University, where they were doing a demo project for school. Thinking they had a good thing going, they decided to take their music into a new setting, as heard on *No More Light Of Day*. To learn more about The Primroses, email *theprimroses@yahoo.com* or call (303) 573-5956.

15. **RAINCHILDREN** "Evergreen" 2:45
(written by M. Shaughnessy, S. Bridgeman) © 1997 Martin Edwards Music
Rainchildren is a five-member modern folk/rock band from central Pennsylvania. *Feels Like Summer* is filled with personal stories about the struggles of life and the beauty of God's grace and understanding. For more information about the band, check out their website at *www.rainchildren.com*.

GAS Collection Volume 12

1. **FIVE IRON FRENZY** "All That Is Good" 5 Minute Walk Records 3:24
(written by L. Ortega, S. Kerr) © 1998 5 Minute Walk Music (ASCAP)
Five Iron Frenzy ventures into new musical territory on their EP, *Quantity Is Job 1* (5 Minute Walk), including swipes at opera, swing and dinosaur rock. All the while, the band fuses their trademark humor with genuine spirituality and compassion.

2. **CROSS MOVEMENT** "Cypha Next Day" Seventh Street Records 4:57
(written by Cross Movement) © 1999 The Cross Movement (SESAC)
Cross Movement is composed of seven members—two of which are associate pastors, and one that is completing Bible college. All seven are active in their local churches. After three 1998 Dove Award Nominations, the group is back in action with their sophomore release, *House Of Representatives* (Seventh Street), combining an original hip-hop sound with uncompromising, biblically based lyrics.

3. **DUMPSTER** "Whose Sorrow Now" Gray Dot Records 4:33
(written by Dumpster) © 1998 Gray Dot Songs (ASCAP)
For *See Through Me* (Gray Dot), the members of Dumpster have created feel-good pop songs lined with crunchy guitar and danceable beats. Hailing from Australia, the band has had an unusual amount of exposure in mainstream press, radio and performances in their homeland—and are poised to make an impact on these shores, as well.

GAS COLLECTION CD VOLUME 1 2

4. **ONE EIGHTY** "Tick-Tock" BEC Recordings 2:58
(written by K. Tennberg, C. Tennberg) © 1998 Thirsty Moon River Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)
The songs of One Eighty are distinguished by undeniably catchy melodies and harmonies. But the band also sets itself apart with a positive message inspired by the members' faith in God. On *Crackerjack* (Tooth & Nail), the members of One Eighty unite the best of ska, punk, surf, skate, swing and every other genre which makes up the adrenalized culture of beach music.

5. **TY TABOR** "The Truth" Metal Blade Records 4:31
(written by T. Tabor) © 1998 Metal Blade Records (ASCAP)
King's X guitarist Ty Tabor says his main inspiration for his solo album came from frequent jam sessions with artists who weren't in his band. "Playing with other people [on their albums] made me realize how much fun a solo record with musical guests jamming on it can be," Tabor says. *Moonflower Lane* (Metal Blade) allows Tabor to further explore some of the sunnier, pop facets of the trademark King's X sound.

6. **JESSE & THE ROCKERS** "Fired Up" Screaming Giant Records 2:00
(written by Jesse & The Rockers) © 1998 Stoned Giant Publishing (ASCAP)
The four members of Jesse & The Rockers, ranging in age from 17 to 23, look to such diverse musical influences as The Cure, MxPx and Joy Electric to create their tightly-wound, no frills, punk pop. The songs move by at such a fast clip that the songs at times seem to have about 10 words—but they're presented with such enthusiasm that the ride is still effective. "Fired Up" can be found on their debut, *T.I.I.N.* (Screaming Giant).

7. **STIR** "Little Love" Kalubone Records 6:01
(written by B. Gross, K. Dietz) © 1998 Kalubone Records/ Bob's Gross Music (SESAC)/ Dietz Family Music (SESAC)
Calling for revival and reformation among believers and non-believers alike, the hard rock band Stir debuts with *Broken Tongues* (Kalubone), a testament that our human words and deeds will always be incomplete without the restoring power of God. The metal ballad "Little Love" is a reminder that it only takes a little love to make a big difference in someone's life.

8. **ADAM AGAIN** "Deep" KMG Records 4:18
(written by G. Eugene, G. Lawless, J. Knox) © 1992 Chenka Chonka Music (ASCAP)
Few bands have influenced the Christian rock community like Adam Again. From passionate vocals to intriguing guitar solos to impeccable percussion, the group's music has left an indelible mark on Christian rock. *Worldwide Favorites* (KMG) offers fans selected songs from the Adam Again era as well as two never-before-released bonus cuts.

9. **KNOWDAVERBS** "The Syllabus" Gotee Records 4:04
(written by M. Boyer, T. Collins, R. Robbins, L. Kimmey) © 1999 Gotee Music/ Phollon Empty Music/ Butter Hits Music/ Elim Music (BMI)
"The literal meaning of [my] name," says Knowdaverbs, "is a combination of my favorite book, Proverbs, and the idea of acting out the 'verbs' through knowledge of the Word." His debut, *The Syllabus* (Gotee), features guests such as Lisa Kimmey Bragg (Out Of Eden) and Toby McKeehan (dc Talk).

10. **HUNTINGTONS** "We Don't Care" Tooth & Nail Records 2:03
(written by M. Huntington, C. Huntington) © 1998 We Own Your Songs, Inc. (SESAC)
Not your average Christian punk band, the members of The Huntingtons write fun, poppy punk songs. Says Cliffy Huntington, "It just felt a lot more real to us when we decided to write regular, normal songs about life." Many of their early, out-of-print songs find new life on the live album *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*, their latest from Tooth & Nail.

11. **FREETO BOAT** "Where Do We Go" Bettie Rocket Records 4:20
(written by Freeto Boat) © 1998 Bettie Rocket (BMI)
Freeto Boat joins frantic, infectious upbeats, blistering horn action and hep-hep gang yells. With influences such as Five Iron Frenzy and NOFX, this eight piece ska-core outfit has been playing for more than two years. On their debut, *Hindsight 20/20* (Bettie Rocket), Freeto Boat blends elements of ska, punk and hardcore.

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Cross Movement

Three years ago, a rumbling began in Christian rap's underground. Calling themselves Cross Movement, a group emerged with a hard-hitting message of having the mind of Christ—hence the name of their 1996 debut, *Heaven's Mentality*. The group's unique East Coast style even garnered them a Dove Award nomination in 1998.

They are at it again with their sophomore project, *House Of Representatives*, a disc that has a harder and edgier sound. But the message is still the same.

"Basically, we're singing the same song," says Earthquake. "It's all about Jesus Christ."

"Thematically," says Tonic, "*Heaven's Mentality* was about having the mind of Christ. Now we're coming with encouragement to live the life, to truly represent God."

Unlike many artists who go to a gig, play their part and leave, Cross Movement has different aspirations when it comes to the ministry of their music. Working as co-laborers with churches and organizations, they help convey the Gospel to youth through workshops—which include teaching, question and answer sessions, relationship building and a concert.

"Ultimately," says Tonic, "we want to get away from just accepting only concert gigs. We'd like to have the independence to do workshops all across the country as the Spirit leads."

As is to be expected, with *House of Representatives*, Cross Movement has grown artistically and spiritually. They've learned more about engineering, acquainted themselves with mastering down and perfected their live stage presence. Tonic believes God is working to bring into fruition plans they thought were down the road.

"Everyone's ready. Everybody's realizing how deep and serious this is," he says. "When you constantly get letters from people saying how your music has impacted their lives, it definitely magnifies the importance of the mission. We simply want to continue to bring God's agenda and truth. And because we've been faithful with a little, God has given us favor. The plans we thought were far off look as if they may be happening in the near future."

—*Digiprez*

Mukala. Their name isn't easy to pronounce (it's "muh-kuh-luh"), and their music isn't easy to describe. Their debut, *Fiction* (Essential), takes listeners on a fresh sonic journey that combines elements of R&B, modern rock and edgy alternative into a sound that is both accessible and challenging.

But the first thing people will notice is the name. "More people mispronounce it than don't," group leader Dan Mukala says. "Someone suggested using my name, and I resisted it at first. But I guess because of the creative contributions and putting the band together, it just kind of worked."

"We've heard everything from *muck-a-luck* to *moooo-kah-lah*," says Nina Williams, director of marketing at Essential Records. "We finally put a little soundbite on our website that has Dan just saying the name over and over again. And when you say *Mukala* 20 times fast, it gets pretty amusing."

Mukala describes his music as "street real." With *Fiction* they aren't trying to be larger than life, but instead create music everyone can relate to. Songs like "Soap" speak of redemption in unmistakable late '90s lingo with snappy high-tech effects. The bouncing beat of "Skip To The End" is a mesmerizing reminder of God's plan for the future. The moody, but comfortably eerie, "Stranger Than Fiction" tells us that God's ways and love are sometimes more outlandish than anything found in *Ripley's Believe-It-or-Not*.

In 1993, he moved to Nashville to attend college, and it's there he hooked up with drummer Jason Collum and guitarist Alex Nifong. "It's something I really want to be a part of," says Nifong [who has previously played with Considering Lily and Zilch]. "The ministry is where the rubber hits the road. This is a band where we can reach out to others."

Fiction's themes touch on a number of issues—from grace and redemption to abortion and the end of the world. "I look at an album like a play," Mukala says. "You don't reveal the moral of the story or purpose behind it in the first act. You let it unfold. As the acts develop, the story develops. I hope there's something Christians can find to relate to. For unbelievers, I hope it points them to the hope we have inside."

—Margaret Feinberg

Puller

"We really are a kinder, gentler Puller," vocalist/guitarist/lyricist Mike Lewis says. Uninitiated listeners may be hard-pressed to find much gentle on the hard rock band's second full-length CD, *Closer Than You Think* (Tooth & Nail), but the project is indeed much more melodic than their debut. Combining loves of U2, Fugazi and Swervedriver, the guys made an album that showcases loud guitars and Lewis' rough, yet understandable vocals.

"[Our first album] *Sugarless*, is a little wackier," Lewis says. The album netted the band a devoted group of fans and garnered MTV airplay of the song "6x6." In the two years since then, Puller has experienced several personnel changes, spent a lot of time on the road and churned out plenty of new songs.

"We first wanted to do a double album, because we had so many songs," Lewis says. "It would be gutsy to put out a double CD." *Closer Than You Think* isn't a double album, but the guys—Lewis, bassist Dustin Holt, drummer Geoff Riley and guitarist Miles—still provide plenty of musical and lyrical meat to chew on in its 13 tracks. Several of the songs that ended up on the CD were written in the studio near the 11th hour. "Songs come easy for us," Lewis says. "We don't force anything."

Of course, it's easy to write when you have something to write about. "I felt like last year I suffered more as a person and have been through valleys and deserts," Lewis says. "When you go through stuff like that, it's sort of like David writing songs." Consequently, many of the tracks fall into the prayer and plea category. "Wishing," "Bring Me In" and "If I Had These Things" all reek with humility and honesty.

But Lewis won't make music to fit into a stereotypical Christian mold. Artists, he asserts, are stripped of their individuality to fit a formula and achieve certain sales, and he refuses to do that. "People buy certain things because they think they're godly," he says. "But I don't want to sell God."

Puller just wants to make music. "Rock music is really lame right now. All the trendy stuff is making its way through," Lewis says. "The bands that are going to matter are the bands that hang in there and do what they do based on their heart."

—Matt Simon

Dingees

For Pegleg, principle songwriter of The Dingees, making music was always a distant dream. "I always wanted to play music like The Clash and some of the other bands I listened to, but I never thought it would work out."

During high school, he started playing the sax and joined a band. After they disbanded due to lack of interest, Pegleg became a roadie on a tour. The Dingees were formed from conversations between Pegleg and Dave Chevalier, sax player for The O.C. Supertones. The two conspired to form a band similar to the ones they grew up admiring. "Dave and I were talking about the kind of music we liked and thought it would be cool to play clubs with the bands we looked up to," Pegleg said. By the time the duo was back in Orange County, Calif., The Dingees was formed.

Armageddon Massive is a lyrical commentary of sorts of the events that surround Pegleg's life. "Most of the inspiration for the album just came from the stuff around me—just stuff that I would see everyday and I would get an idea and write about it."

Some of the songs on *Armageddon Massive* seem to have socio-political overtones. "One song in particular, 'Rebel Youth,' is a reference to my neighborhood where I live now, compared to where I grew up. My new neighbors are stuck up and don't get to know anyone; that's kind of what I was talking about in the song."

"Bulletproof" is a tongue-in-cheek look at people who have egos so large they begin to feel they are bulletproof. "Chaos Control" was taken from an editorial in a local paper; the author of the editorial had said she was so inundated with pop culture that she couldn't remember important things like her mother's birthday, yet she could recall the jingles to commercials and what Pearl Jam wore to the Grammys.

The Dingees' musical territory—they play ska, they play punk, they play reggae—is staked out from the musical interests of all the members. Rather than mixing styles, they stay true to whichever style a particular song was written in. "I would love to experiment further with the reggae sound, come up with our own blend," Pegleg says. "Kind of what Nirvana did with the whole grunge thing."

—Robert Kendal

It's surprising to discover the members of Spoken are just small-town boys, having grown up together in tiny Lowell, Ark. The band—vocalist Matt Baird, guitarists Jef Cunningham and B.J. Watson, bassist Steven Howk, drummer Ronnie Crupper—in very un-small-town fashion has concocted a hard-driving mix of rap and hard rock reminiscent of Rage Against The Machine and Every Day Life for *On Your Feet*. The album is a call to arms for Christians, designed to get listeners out of their comfort zones both spiritually and physically.

But that also means they've been misunderstood as they take their unconventional music to the masses. "Some people who are really conservative don't really think this style of music can be Christian," Watson says.

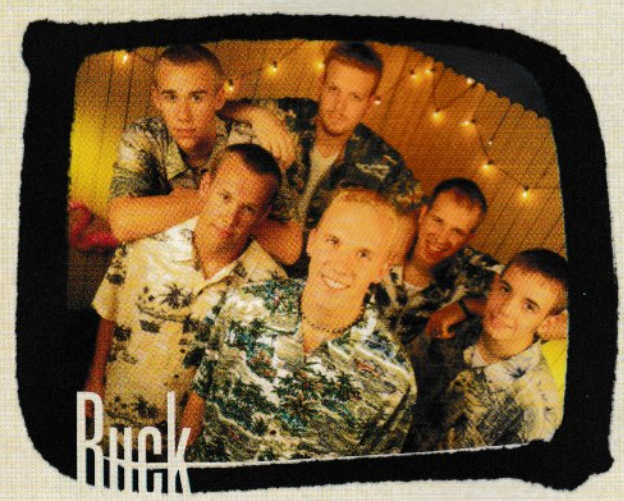
Like the time they attended Christmas cantata at an Indiana church. "On the way out, a lot of people were giving us looks, and telling us, *Yeah, we'll be praying for ya*," Watson remembers. As they walked outside, the pastor had some odd words for a girl following them. "He asked this girl, *You're not following those boys, are you? Because they don't look like they're saved.*"

But people can't stop the boys in Spoken from ministering, albeit loudly. When the music stops, they often find themselves talking to kids with family problems: "With some of us having had friends pass away, or parents who have divorced, or things like that," Watson notes, "we tend to draw those kids after the show."

Of course, there is always a cost to touring. "You tend to miss the people you care about," adds Baird, an avid reader. Of course, he probably gets the least reading done since he's also the driver. "My girlfriend's dad bought the van for us," Baird says, "so I drive it. I have a hard time trusting anyone else driving. You could say I'm a control freak."

And what a drive. "We've been to 28 states so far," Cunningham says, "and that's just since October." While most road travelers take their time to stop and buy souvenirs, this has been all but impossible for Spoken. "We should do something like that," Cunningham laughs, "but we're always too busy driving to pick something up."

—Dan MacIntosh



Like the horse that launches its rider off its back, Buck—an acronym for "Building Up Christ's Kingdom"—charges ahead with its aggressive musical assault. A combination of traditional ska, third-wave ska, swing and alternative punk, their music transcends definition.

And they take their lyrics seriously, too. Bassist Rick Jacoby says through them he can teach others what he's learned and help them avoid falling into the same problems. "You think you're so isolated when you're going through stuff," he explains. "But pretty soon you realize how many hundreds of people have the same problems. You can really help somebody by telling them what God has taught you."

Buck is made up of Jacoby, frontman Dan Reynolds, his brother Dave (who plays trumpet), Al Brown (trumpet player formerly with The Insyderz), Mark "Floyd" Sahlstrom (trombone) and Josh Wheeler (guitarist). They're able to minister because each, ranging in age from 18 to 23, has a story similar to someone in the audience.

Brown discovered Christ at a youth camp when he was 18. "I've been through some things that are a little more intense than most of the other guys in the band, but I've been able to use that—how God brought me out of my past—to help other people out of it," he says. "The one thing I know is that I can tell people they're not alone. I didn't think there was another soul who had anything in common with me as far as these things went. Now I know that's not true."

While a Buck show is an intense frenzy of musical action, the band often closes with praise & worship. "Sometimes [the worship set] is to build a show," Jacoby says. "Or sometimes we'll do a full show and then afterwards, if the kids are yellin' for us to play more or do an encore or something like that, we'll stick around and lead some worship. It depends on where the Spirit's leading."

Showing the reality of Christ to the audience—both those who have grown up in church and those who haven't—is at the forefront of Buck's shows. "We're trying to emphasize the reality of being a Christian, the everyday commitment and responsibility involved," Brown says. "It's not just going to church."

—Jo Hannah and Thom Gladhill

"We're a slow band in a fast world," says Dumpster's Grant Nelson. "We're a Christian band who plays with predominantly non-Christian bands."

Dumpster can pull that off pretty easily, partially because they hail from Brisbane, Australia. Since Christian music isn't as segregated in Australia as in America, their faith blazes in a mainstream setting. "Out here, there are excellent Christian bands who are regularly playing with non-Christian bands and sharing their faith," Nelson says.

The band is constantly aware of its environment, and the guys strive not to sacrifice art, integrity or faith. And their efforts seem to be paying off.

The Australian edition of *Rolling Stone* featured the band even before they had a full-length album, and other magazine and radio support has been increasingly strong. Their debut, *See Through Me* (distributed here by Gray Dot), could well break the band in America.

The album is full of energy, but they mix it up, often creating a mood reminiscent of Starflyer 59 or Promise Ring. Their standard three-piece "evocative indie rock" comes from a fresh perspective, and Nelson's lyrics focus mainly on God's impact and His relationship with humans.

As with so many Christian bands, Dumpster hopes to relate to listeners, especially non-Christians, in a way everyone can understand. "I think even if people don't know Jesus, they can relate to seeing things that are wrong or unjust, sometimes on a global scale, and sometimes on a personal one," Nelson says.

Nelson (vocals/guitar/hammond), along with Steve Langella (bass/vocals) and Murray Darnill (drums) have been playing together for nearly three years. They've made a name in mainstream clubs and venues, in addition to large mainstream and Christian festivals such as Blackstump, the Aussie equivalent of Cornerstone.

"We have committed ourselves to building relationships with people in this more secular scene and sharing God's love with them," Darnill says. "We try to use [our music] as a way of getting alongside non-Christians, building relationships with them and trying to make a difference for God."

—Matt Simon

While industrial rock, electronica pop and most of their derivations have been built on negative and cynical views of the world and society, Massivivid's Wally Shaw has a different vision. "I've always been a pretty positive, optimistic person, and the really dark perspective of industrial rock, and all its subsequent off-shoots, actually is very creepy to me," he says. "But I've always been attracted by the power of the sound. Whatever you say comes across with tremendous impact. The idea of using that forcefulness to convey love rather than fatalism and hostility intrigues and excites me."

Shaw began making records as a member of the late '80s electronic duo Deitiphobia and rode out most of a decade under that moniker. After the group's demise, Shaw and his wife, Sherri (who was for a time also in the group), decided it was time to make a fresh start. "I just wanted to do it right with a band and not really be concerned with commerce," he says. In 1996, Shaw founded the six-member Massivivid and recorded an EP of his songs. After the band performed at Cornerstone, a representative from Tattoo Records asked for the EP and eventually signed them.

Massivivid matches the intensity of Smashing Pumpkins or Nine Inch Nails. They empower their sonic wallop with pop sensibilities and sound primed for mainstream success. "We have a real desire to make a dent in the general market, but we don't have any desire to abandon our beliefs or water down what we do," Shaw says. "There's such a wide range of great, Christ-centered music being made now that people can find the Gospel message being presented in whatever musical genre they enjoy and relate to. I think Massivivid is reaching an audience that might not find its way to that message through any other kind of music. We're all parts of the one Body, and what matters the most is that everything we all do, we do to the glory of God."

—Thompson Brooks and Robert Kendall

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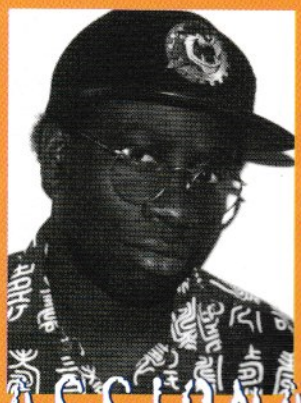
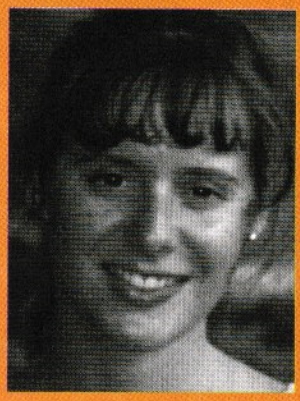


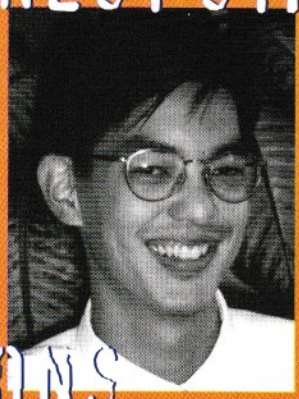
Name: George Luke
Age: 35
Hometown: London
Pet Peeve: Narrow-mindedness
Phrase You Most Often Overuse: "For no apparent reason."
Life Verse: 2 Timothy 1:14
Favorite Author: Terry Pratchett



Name: Margaret Feinberg
Age: 24
Hometown: Steamboat Springs
Pet Peeve: Putting a new roll of toilet paper on the spool
Phrases You Most Often Overuse: "Dude," "cool" and "stoked."
Life Verse: Isaiah 43:1
Favorite Author: Ron Mehl

PASSIONATE VOICES
HONEST STRUGGLES
CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

Name: Marti Smith
Age: 27
City I'd Most Like To Live In: Vancouver
Favorite TV Show From Childhood: *Hong Kong Fooey*
Favorite Psalm: 27
Favorite Crayon Color: Tango



Name: Doug Hsu
Age: 29
Best dish you can prepare: lasagna
Most annoying habit: reckless driving
Biggest fear: large flying cockroaches
Favorite book of the Bible: 2 Timothy

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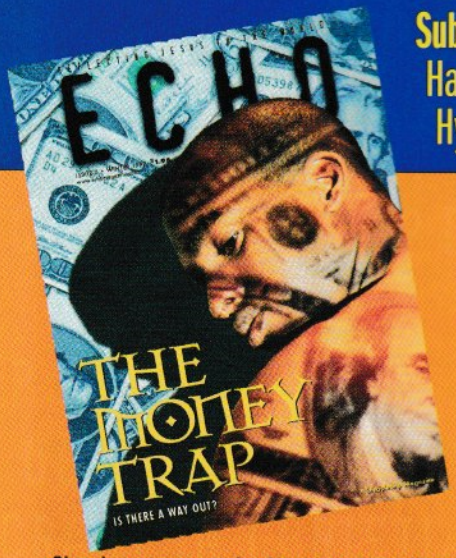

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7 reviews

SOME STUFF WE LIKE, SOME WE DIDN'T LIKE AS MUCH, AND HIDDEN MESSAGES WORTH LARGE CA

One Eighty

Crackerjack
BEC

Make no mistake: One Eighty is a party band with a mission. With a playful pop that grabs onto bits of ska, punk and swing—whatever's needed at the time—the band dances and rocks through a set that says it's OK to have a good time, but without Jesus you'll still be hollow inside.

Fronted by chick rockers Kim Tennberg (vocals & trumpet) and Madelyn Mendoza (vocals & percussion), One Eighty triumphs on *Crackerjack* at being pop accessible without being pop schmaltz. The eight members of the group, aided by producer Gene Eugene (who also plays some keys on the record), form a real musical team: Throughout the album, the various instruments come and go, play only when needed and then get out of the way. The net effect is that they at various times echo the beach-rock energy of Dakoda Motor Co., the bouncy pop of No Doubt and the eclectic vibe of Mayfair Laundry—but One Eighty never once loses its balance.

Peeling back the layers on *Crackerjack*, you see a surprisingly sophisticated approach. "Cool World" is a runaway locomotive, a surf-punk-pop gem that rattles off the simple joys of weekends, junk food and TV, before pointing out (much like the writer of Ecclesiastes) that it's all meaningless without God.

Many of the songs deal with romantic relationships (or the lack thereof), from the hyper "Wait" (for the single person) to the rockin' "Sleepless Nights" (about a couple that has parted ways). For "When We First Dated," One Eighty trades back and forth between the sweet innocence of dating and the disillusionment of a marriage where one feels taken for granted (*I've learned to pray everyday that God will see us through*). Musically, the "dating" segments are matched to a soundtrack that conjures a sockhop, while the hectic "married" segments speed up to punk velocity.

The band also tackles how Christians should interact with the world around them, through songs like the frantic "Sally" and "405," a cute little swingin' number about how we should be a Christian witness even when driving on the freeway.

The album includes two kinetic evangelistic tracts, the swing shuffle of "Tick Tock" and the double-time punk of "Just Like You." The collection is rounded out by the worship song "By My Side" and a fun remake of the Go-Go's "Vacation" (both driven by a ska horn section).

While One Eighty wraps their songs with a variety of styles, their sound is often played inventively and superbly. The double-lead female vocals tie it all together, with Tennberg and Mendoza harmonizing even during the verses, making the package accessible without blunting the edges.

With One Eighty's unashamed party sound—they bounce, they swing, they harmonize—it's odd to realize that all of the songs on *Crackerjack* (even the cover song) hinge on a kind of friction—between man and God, man and woman or the Church and its responsibility. It's a small complaint, but maybe in the future the band could relax a little. After all, sometimes it's OK to party.

—Chris Well

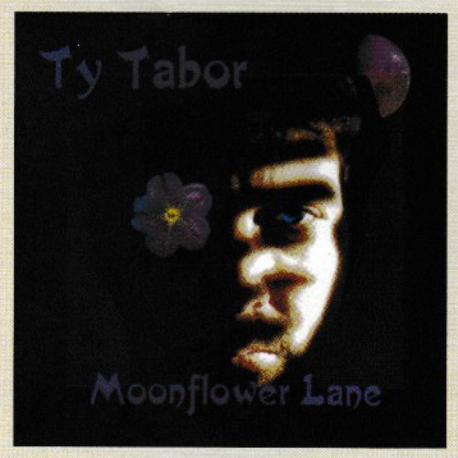
PRIZES (OK, WE MADE PART OF THAT UP)

Ty Tabor

Moonflower Lane
Metal Blade

King's X has always had an odd relationship with Christian music, the band caught in a violent tug-of-war between the general market and Christian fans. Sure, one of the band's prime selling points has been their unique penchant for melding solid pop melodies and Brit-invasion harmonies with the storm and stress of honest-to-gosh heavy metal. But the other selling point, for many fans, has been the hope—and, specifically, hope in Christ—that has driven many of the songs, some quite blatantly.

Enter *Moonflower Lane,* the new solo album from King's X-guitarist and vocalist Ty Tabor. With a decidedly sunnier disposition than your usual "dark & angular" King's X affair, Tabor expands on the pop side he brings to the King's X equation. But while the King's X connection is unmistakable, Tabor takes advantage of his freedom to explore the melodies and harmonies, as well as the acoustic strums and electric jangles he loves so much.



He also takes advantage of his freedom with the subject matter. Much of the record revolves around a simple theme—the Lord has blessed him with a good life. For example, with the bright "I Do" Tabor appreciates the simple pleasures of life; compares notes with a friend (a bandmate, perhaps?) who sees life differently; and then he sweetly remembers a date with his wife.

At other times, Tabor addresses his social conscience ("Hollow Eyes") and his faith ("The Truth"). The former is a kind of symphony, and the closest on the record to the trademark King's X sound, building from a discordant symphony scratching their strings to the explosion of a dark guitar riff, as the apathetic character in the song finds himself indifferent to the plight of a dying world. In the more straight-ahead guitar rock of "The Truth," Tabor addresses the importance of listening for the still, small voice of God, and how easy it can be to get distracted (including, interesting point, during a misguided church service).

Although there are definite glimmers of Tabor's faith, those hoping for stronger Christian content could be disappointed. Tabor chooses a more subtle approach with *Moonflower Lane*; several of the songs are outspoken, but some take a more obscure direction, where the poetry is thick with meaning (or, perhaps, just thick).

But this is just hair-splitting. *Moonflower* is a wonderful celebration of life and love and faith. It is in some ways a fine companion to the King's X discography. Better still, it is a fine guitar pop record in its own right.

—*Scott W. Christopher*

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Jesse & The Rockers

T.I.N.
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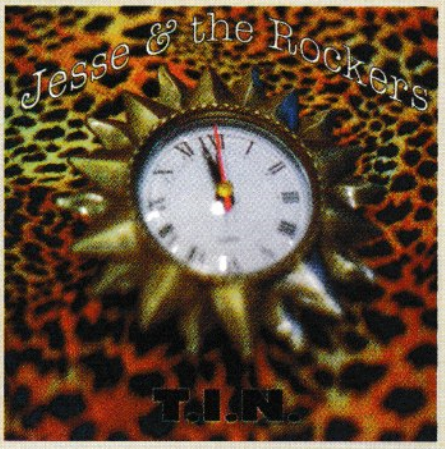
From the opening salvo of "Tradition," Jesse & The Rockers stake their territory quickly: With tightly-wound, no frills, punk pop the band tells us they don't have time to be judged by the conservative nay-sayers—they're too busy sharing the Gospel and breaking down the barriers between the Church and the disenfranchised. The lyrics are as upfront as



could be: "Great Tom" celebrates being saved; "Kendall" is a proposal to a girl who loves Jesus; "Abstain" is a reminder that true love waits; and "Fired Up" urges a friend to take that step and acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

There are also songs that speak to the normal, non-spiritual facets of a person's life ("Birthday Boy," "Snowhite"). And there are songs where Jesse & The Rockers stretch themselves, both musically (such as the dreamy "Superstar Dreamboy") and lyrically (the melancholy "Suzane"), indicating they have promise to grow.

The songs move by at such a fast clip they at times seem to have about 10 words—but they're presented with such enthusiasm, and the Rockers are tight enough, that the ride is still effective. In all, Jesse & The Rockers have a strong album with *T.I.N.*, and the extra touches could be a promise that this is only the beginning.

—Gregg Cole

Stir

Broken Tongues
Kaluboné

With guitar sledgehammers and lyrical rivets, the band Stir has built a monument to man's insufficiency. It's a sort of antithesis to the Tower of Babel; while the former was intended to show the unity of man but led to the language barriers, *Broken Tongues* is a testament that our human words and deeds will always be incomplete without the restoring power of God.

Although they wrap their hard rock treatise in minor chords and unsettling harmonies, the band refuses to let the listener wallow in despair. The lyrics always point to hope, from the loud, dysfunctional anthem "Broken Tongues" (which sees the common thread throughout history of nations that thought themselves too important to need salvation) to the moody shuffle of "Joe's Son" (about the Jews who rejected Jesus because they thought He was just one of them) to the creepy metal ballad "Little Love" (a reminder that it only takes a little love to make a big difference in someone's life). A nice touch is the addition of Spanish-language versions of "Joe's Son" and "Higher."

Although Stir avoids many of the metal clichés, there's enough of the flavor to narrow the band's reach; *Broken Tongues* will probably not help the band crossover to

fans of punk or hardcore (but then, the fandoms have started to melt together, so who knows?). The album is definitely on target for fans of metal—the eerie guitar solos; the slow pound of guitar riffs; the odd, angular melodies and harmonies; and the occasional dark, acoustic ballad (not to mention the conceptual reach of the lyrics). *Broken Tongues* is as solid a monument as they come.

—Chris Well

reviews

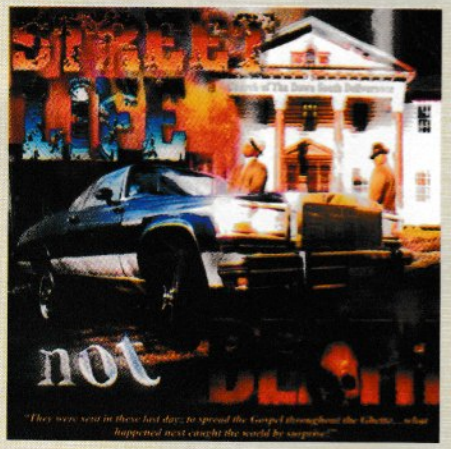
Street Life, Not Death

Various
Southern Gospeltality Records

I like surprises. Namely, *Street Life, Not Death*, a compilation of rap filled with a variety of Baskin Rappers flavors: g-funk, east coast and midwest. With a little R&B in the mix, this is thoroughly an impressive collection.

Throughout, the message is simple: "Get saved"—seen in cuts like "BMW (By My Word)," "Watchagonnado" and "Newsoul." Tracks like "Deliver Me" and "Have Mercy" are modern day Psalms in their frankness with God, expressed as prayers.

Sprinkled throughout the CD are snippets of commentary, presented in a way that definitely relates to today's generation:



"This generation is not going to listen to choir music. They need rap music. So we're just going to take the Word of God, we're going to put it in the rap music, we're going to put it on the streets, and we're going to save some souls."

'Nuff said. Any questions?

—*Digiprez*

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history

Adam Again

Worldwide Favorites: Selected Songs Of The Adam Again Era
KMG Records

In the song "You Can Fall In Love," the one track on the compilation *Worldwide Favorites: Selected Songs Of The Adam Again Era* from the band's 1986 debut, *In A New World Of Time,* Gene Eugene offers up this creedal statement of faith in Jesus: "He was God, and nothing less/ He came to fill your emptiness."

The great contribution of Eugene's writing is that, while it proclaimed the ultimate truth of God's freeing love, it dealt honestly with the moments of waiting, longing, hoping for wholeness. Whereas much of Christian music devoted itself to the promised fullness that we experience in God, Adam Again had the courage to speak of the emptiness—the moments of loss and pain and doubt—that all of us, if we're honest with ourselves and God, know something about.

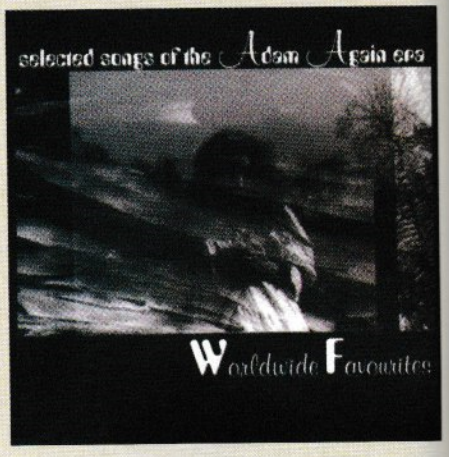
And it doesn't hurt that these bold, poetic observations were delivered in some of the most creative and inspiring rock music anywhere. Not just within the Christian artistic community, where they stood head and shoulders above a bunch of copycat bands imitating the pop/alternative flavor of the moment, but anywhere, everywhere.

In the epistles, the Apostle Paul wrote of a thorn that God did not remove and invited his readers to "work out your own salvation in fear and trembling." Yet rarely in Christian music have artists dealt with the thorn that remains, or so honestly struggled in their art, acknowledging the fear and trembling that the human experience at time invites.

In the title track of the '92 release, *Dig,* the difficulty of life is acknowledged even as God's grace is valued: *The earth is hard, but the treasure fine.* Repeatedly, Adam Again's music unearths the depths of humanness, the gritty reality of God's love in Jesus. But you've got to dig sometimes; it's not always accessible on the surface.

Adam Again rarely, if ever, really toured outside of its Southern California home; those in the Midwest were lucky to catch the band every couple of years on the late-night Cornerstone stage. Those were amazing musical moments. Eugene's haunting, surprisingly beautiful vocals; Greg Lawless' brutal, passionate guitar runs; drummer John Knox's rich, sensuous rhythms; bassist Paul Valadez either rocked with undaunted audacity or kept it so funky that the only natural response was the effortless dancing that possessed vocalist Riki Michele—she shook and twirled while the rest of the band stood still, the music itself evoking her eerie, potent vocal harmonies. When Dan Michaels joined on sax and Steve Hindalong on percussion, things managed to get looser, while somehow staying tight.

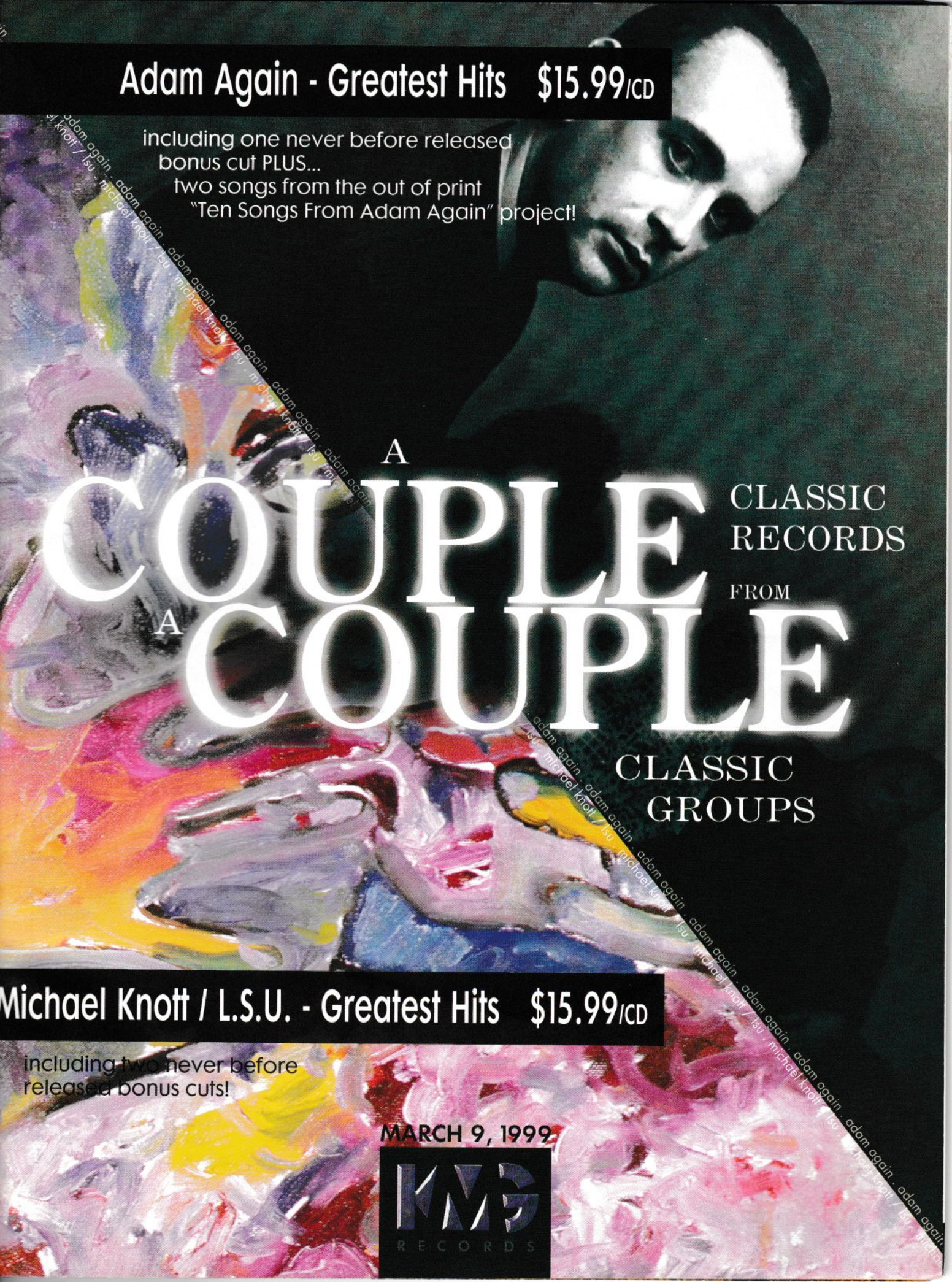
Paradoxical—rich with insight, yet often delivered as a stream of consciousness—Eugene claims in "Stone" that *It's not my history/ The song's not about me at all.* Whether the songs of regret and remorse over a lost relationship dealt directly with the actual divorce of Eugene and Michele, or came from some other experience, for those of us caught up in our own mistakes and brokenness, these songs offered a kind of healing balm.



There was an honest humanness and good faith in the invitation to live with "Eyes Wide Open," even when there's "Bad News On The Radio." Our love might be up in smoke like a "River on Fire," and the harsh reality is that sometimes all is not "All Right," but we can find rest in the knowledge that the *one dying on the cross for the sick and the lost/ Is the lover that I long to know* ("Deep").

Adam Again's lush, rich rock 'n' roll—artful, compelling and creative to a fault—has been a real gift. *Worldwide Favorites* features Christian music filled up with thorns, written and performed in fear and trembling. Such honesty and artful beauty is rare, and should be celebrated.

—Brian Quincy Newcomb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5 SEVEN DAY JESUS
"Always Comes Around" (ForeFront)
6 ALL STAR UNITED
"Superstar" (Essential)
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"Heartstring" (Cadence)
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9 THE INSYDERZ
"Paradise" (KMG)
10 FIVE IRON FRENZY
"Dandelions" (SaraBellum)
11 SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER
"Kiss Me" (Squint)
12 MISS ANGIE
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10 GATHERING OF SOULS
"Rust" (independent)

RHYTHMIC

1 RAZE
"That's The Way" (ForeFront)
2 LAKITA
"Speak To The Hand" (N•Soul)
3 WORLD WIDE MESSAGE TRIBE
"Everything I Need" (Warner Resound)
4 THE ECHOING GREEN
"Freak Out" (SaraBellum)
5 KIRK FRANKLIN
"Revolution" (Gospo Centric)
6 T-BONE
"It Ain't Easy" (Metro One)
7 SONIK BOOM OF LOVE
"No Mo" (N•Soul)
8 GRITS
"Hopes And Dreams" (Gotee)
9 L.G. WISE
"Time Like Dis" (Grapetree)
10 MASSIVIVID
"Flesh Wound" (Tattoo)

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WMPL Hancock, MI
WMSJ Portland, ME
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Blah, Blah, Blah

By Chris Well

Of caped crusaders and cover stories

It all started when I was in the first grade. My teacher told me I could not grow up to be Batman.

I guess at that young age I decided that if I couldn't be Batman, I could write about him—and started writing my own short stories and drawing my own comic books.

Zip ahead a few years—surprisingly, not that many—and I had discovered Christian rock. And wanted to tell other people about it. It naturally grew into a desire to write about Christian rock, which (if you haven't figured it out by now) I do for a living.

Since we regularly get letters and emails asking how to get started on exactly this sort of path, I thought I'd take some time here to tell you exactly that. How to get started.

I have come to the conclusion that these are the three most important things:

1) Read.
2) Write.
3) Rewrite.

1) READ. Voraciously. Read good writing, read bad writing, read how to write, read everything.

2) WRITE. A lot. I believe it was Ray Bradbury who once said there was like a million words worth of bad writing inside of every person—the trick was to keep writing until you have it all out of your system (I'm still working on it). Write for your high school newspaper, write for your college newspaper, write for the local newspaper. Write a short story or a stage play or a radio drama.

3) REWRITE. Your first draft is always incomplete (and maybe even your second and third draft). Whether we're talking about that English paper or a cover story for a magazine, trust me—you want to set it aside and come back later. When you look at it with fresh eyes, you'll discover how much smoother it would be if you moved this section over here, reorganized that block over there, switched this word choice for that. Not to mention fitting in that great point or quote you forgot.

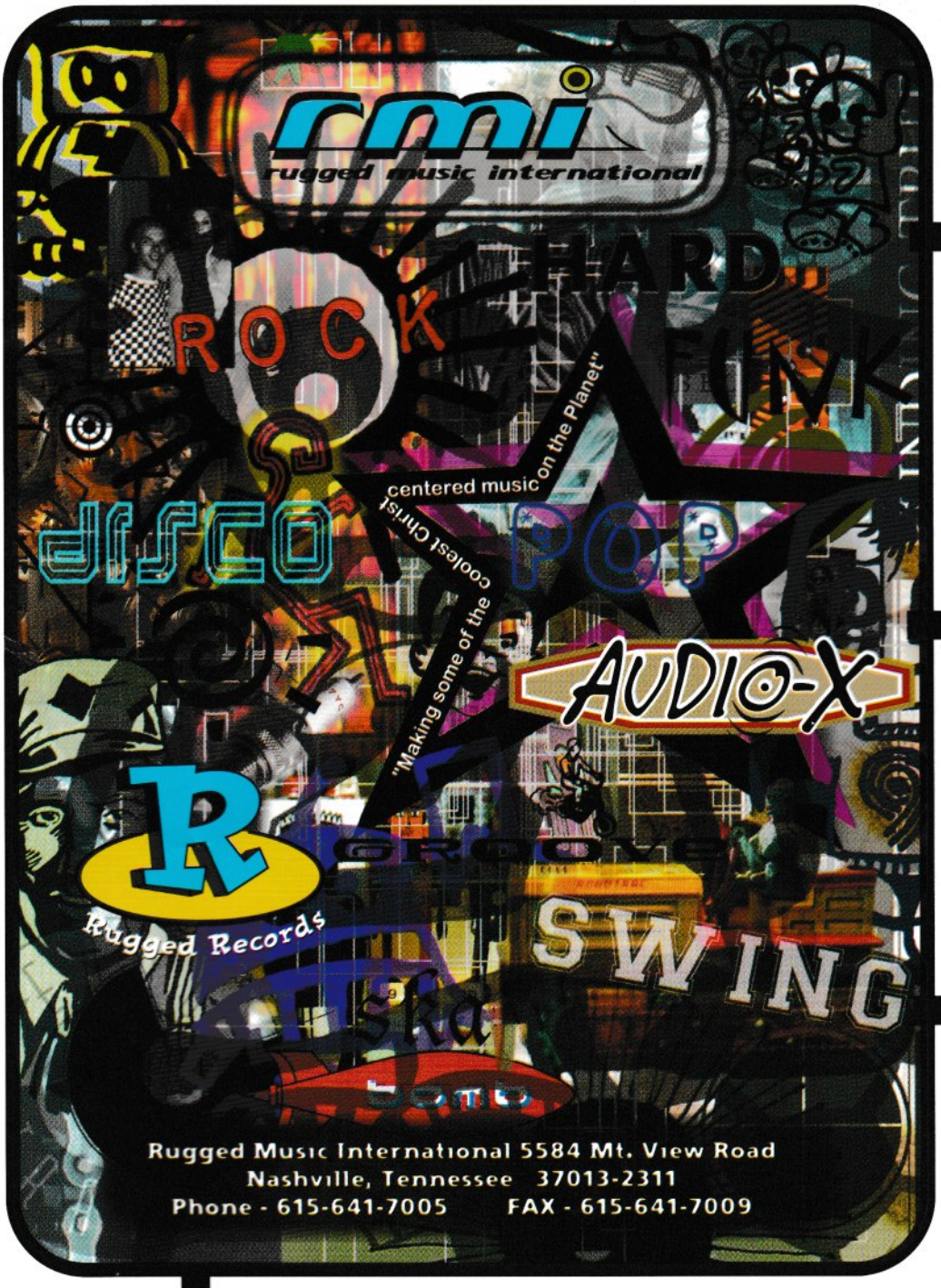
There are many fine resources for the budding writer, too. There is the excellent book *On Writing Well,* by William Zinsser (Harper Perennial). There's the great magazine *Writer's Digest* (*www.writersdigest.com*), which includes all sorts of advice for all sorts of writing (from journalism to screenplays to greeting cards); the WD family also includes some great books, too.

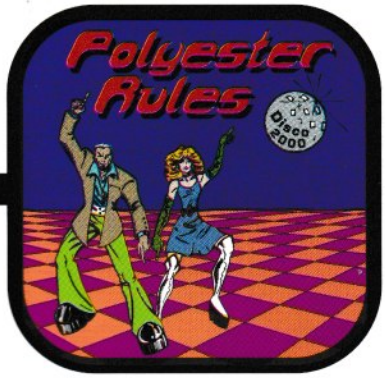
If you want to get a feel for some of the specifics that editors at various kinds of magazines look for, you can find writer's guidelines at several places on the Web, including *www.awoc.com/guidelines.cfm* and at the *Writer's Digest* site at *www.writersdigest.com/guidelines.*

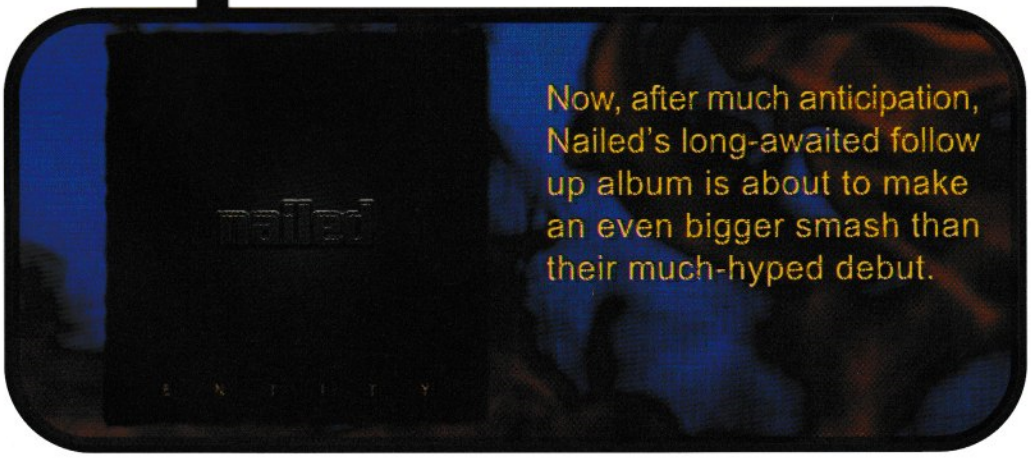
If you're still in school, there are so many opportunities for you right there. Check out classes in creative writing, dramatic writing, or any other kind of class that will help you deconstruct writing into its basic parts so you can start to build your own.

I want to encourage you; there's nothing special about what we do or how we got here; we love to write and we work hard. And some of you are actually more interested in writing drama or comedy or whatever. I want to encourage you, too.

Don't give up—I can tell you from personal experience that dreams do come true. Well, except for that "Batman" one. 7







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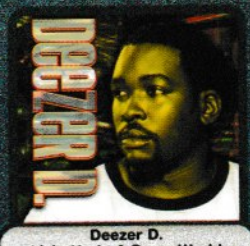

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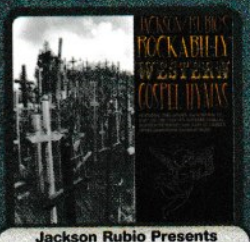

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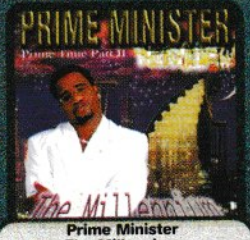

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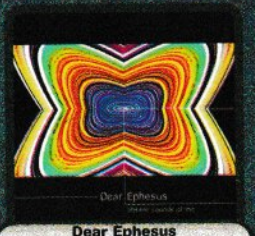

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